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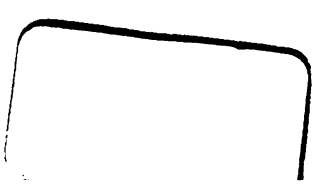

THEOLOGICAL WORKS,

PUBLISHED AT DIFFERENT TIMES,

AND NOW COLLECTED INTO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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1810
Scott

THEOLOGICAL WORKS,

PUBLISHED AT DIFFERENT TIMES,

AND NOW COLLECTED INTO VOLUMES.

BY THOMAS SCOTT,

RECTOR OF ASTON SANDFORD, BUCKS.

VOL. I.

THE FORCE OF TRUTH, AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE. | AND FIFTEEN SERMONS ON SELECT SUBJECTS.

FIRST AMERICAN EDITION.

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he beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and straitway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed - - 397

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THE

FORCE OF TRUTH.

AN

AUTHENTICK NARRATIVE.

FIRST AMERICAN FROM THE SEVENTH LONDON EDITION.

———— *Ut si quis asellum*
In campo doceat parentem currere frœnis.—HORACE.

Vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt.
—*Who teacheth like him?*
JOB xi. 12. xxxvi. 22.

PREFACE

TO THE

FIFTH EDITION.

ALMOST twenty years have now elapsed, since the ensuing Narrative was published. During this time the Author has had abundant opportunities of examining, over and over again, the principles which he then intended to inculcate. If therefore, he had, on further reflection, materially altered his sentiments, he should have thought himself bound, by the strongest obligations, to retract what he had erroneously advanced. But he is thankful that, on the contrary, he feels it incumbent on him to declare most solemnly, as in the presence of God, that every thing he has since experienced, observed, heard, and read, has concurred in establishing his most assured confidence, that the doctrines recommended in this publication, are the grand and distinguishing peculiarities of genuine Christianity.

Very many verbal *corrections, with a few retrenchments and additions, will be found in this edition. In*

improvements of this kind, the Author has bestowed considerable pains; but he has been scrupulously, *and almost* superstitiously, *careful to admit no alterations, which can in the least degree change the meaning of any passage.*

He feels thankful, that the leading desire of his heart, in publishing a work, which seems to relate almost exclusively to himself and his own little concerns, has not been wholly disappointed: but he would earnestly request the prayers of all, who favour the doctrines here inculcated, for a more abundant and extensive blessing on this, and all his other feeble endeavours, to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints."

CHAPEL-STREET, *Oct.* 16, 1798.

N. B. The First Edition was dated Feb. 26, 1779, *when the Author was Curate of Revenstone and Weston-Underwood, near Olney, Bucks.*

THE

FORCE OF TRUTH.

PART I.

An account of the state of the Author's mind and conscience in the early part of his life; especially stating what his sentiments and conduct were, at the beginning of that change of which he proposes to give the history.

THOUGH I was not educated in what is commonly considered as ignorance of God and religion; yet, till the sixteenth year of my age, I do not remember that I ever was under any serious conviction of being a sinner, in danger of wrath or in need of mercy; nor did I ever during this part of my life, that I recollect, offer one *hearty* prayer to God in secret. "Being alienated from God through the ignorance that was in me," I lived without him in the world; and as utterly neglected to pay him any voluntary service, as if I had been an *Atheist* in principle.

But about my sixteenth year I began to see that I was a sinner. I was indeed a leper in every part, there being 'no health in me;' but out of many ex-

ternal indications of inward depravity, conscience discovered and reproached me with one especially; and I was for the first time, disquieted with apprehensions of the wrath of an offended God. My attendance at the Lord's table was expected about the same time: and though I was very ignorant of the meaning and end of that sacred ordinance; yet this circumstance, uniting with the accusations of my conscience, brought an awe upon my spirits, and interrupted my before undisturbed course of sin.

Being, however, an utter stranger to the depravity and helplessness of fallen nature, I had no doubt that I could amend my life whenever I pleased. Previously therefore to communicating, I set about an unwilling reformation; and, procuring a form of prayer, I attempted to pay my secret addresses to the Majesty of heaven. Having in this manner silenced my conscience, I partook of the ordinance: I held my resolutions also, and continued my devotions, such as they were, for a short time; but they were a weariness and a task to me, and, temptations soon returning, I relasped; so that my prayer-book was thrown aside, and no more thought of till my conscience was again alarmed by the next warning given for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Then the same ground was gone over again, and with the same issue. My "goodness was like the morning dew that passeth away;" and, loving sin and disrelishing religious duties as much as ever, I returned, as "the sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire."

With little variation this was my course of life for nine years: but in that time I had such experience of

my own weakness, and the superior force of temptation, that I secretly concluded reformation in my case to be inpracticable. "Can the *Ethiopian* change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" I was experimentally convinced that I was equally unable, with the feeble barrier of resolutions and endeavours, to stem the torrent of my impetuous inclinations, when swelled by welcome, suitable, and powerful temptations: and being ignorant that God had reserved this to himself as his own work, and had engaged to do it for the poor sinner who, feeling his own insufficiency, is heartily desirous to have it done by him, I stifled my convictions as well as I could, and put off my repentance to a *more convenient season*.

But being of a reflecting turn, and much alone, my mind was almost constantly employed. Aware of the uncertainty of life, I was disquieted with continual apprehensions that *this more convenient season* would never arrive; especially as, through an unconfirmed state of health, I had many warnings and near prospects of death and eternity. For a long time I entertained no doubt that impenitent sinners would be miserable for ever in hell; and at some seasons such amazing reflections upon this awful subject forced themselves into my mind, that I was overpowered by them, and my fears became intolerable. At such times my extemporary cries for mercy were so earnest and persevering, that I was scarcely able to give over; though at others I lived without prayer of any sort! Yet in my darkest hours, though my conscience was awakened to discover more and more sinfulness in my whole behaviour, there remained a

hope that I should one day repent and turn unto God. If this hope were from myself, it was a horrid presumption; but the event makes me willing to acknowledge a persuasion that it was from the Lord: for, had it not been for this hope, I should probably have given way to temptations, which frequently assaulted me, to put an end to my own life, in proud discontent with my lot in this world, and in mad despair about another.

A hymn of Dr. *Watts*, (in his admirable little book for children, entitled '*The all-seeing God*,' at this time fell in my way: I was much affected with it, and having committed it to memory was frequently repeating it, and thus continually led to reflect on my guilt and danger.—Parents may from this inconsiderable circumstance be reminded, that it is of great importance to store their children's memories with useful matter, instead of suffering them to be furnished with such corrupting trash as is commonly taught them. They know not what use God may make of these early rudiments of instruction in future life.

At this period, though I was the slave of sin, yet, my conscience, not being pacified, and my principles not greatly corrupted, there seemed some hope concerning me; but at length Satan took a very effectual method of silencing my convictions, that I might sleep securely in my sins: and justly was I given over to a strong delusion to believe a lie, when I held the truth that I did know in unrighteousness. I met with a *Socinian* comment on the Scriptures, and greedily drank the poison, because it quieted my fears and flattered my abominable pride. The whole system

coincided exactly with my inclinations and the state of my mind. In reading this exposition, sin seemed to lose its native ugliness, and to appear a very small and tolerable evil; man's imperfect obedience seemed to shine with an excellency almost divine; and God appeared so entirely and necessarily merciful, that he could not make any of his creatures miserable without contradicting his natural propensity. These things influenced my mind so powerfully, that I was enabled to consider myself, notwithstanding a few little blemishes, as upon the whole a very worthy being. At the same time, the mysteries of the gospel being explained away, or brought down to the level of man's comprehension, by such proud and corrupt, though specious, reasonings; by acceding to these sentiments, I was, in my own opinion, in point of understanding and discernment, exalted to a superiority above the generality of mankind; and I pleased myself in looking down with contempt upon such as were weak enough to believe the orthodox doctrines. Thus I generally soothed my conscience: and if at any time I was uneasy at the apprehension that I did not thoroughly *deserve*, eternal happiness, and was not entirely fit for heaven; the same book afforded me a soft pillow on which to lull myself to sleep: it *argued*, and I then thought *proved*, that there were no *eternal* torments; and it insinuated that there were *no* torments except for notorious sinners, and that such as should just fall short of heaven would sink into their original nothing. With this welcome scheme I silenced all my fears, and told my accusing conscience, that if I

fell short of heaven I should be annihilated, and never be sensible of my loss.

By experience I am well acquainted with Satan's intention, in employing so many of his servants to invent and propagate those pestilent errors, whether in speculation or practice, that have in all ages corrupted and enervated the pure and powerful doctrine of the gospel; for they lead to forgetfulness of God and security in sin, and are deadly poison to every soul that imbibes them, unless a miracle of grace prevent. Such on one hand are all the superstitious doctrines of popery: purgatory, penances, absolutions, indulgences, merits of good works, and the acceptableness of will-worship and uncommanded observances; what are these but engines of the Devil to keep men quiet in their sins? Man, resolved to follow the dictates of his depraved inclination, and not to bound his pursuits and enjoyments by the limits of God's holy law, catches at any thing to soften the horrible thought of eternal misery. This is the awakening reflection, God's sword in the conscience, which it is Satan's business by all his diabolical artifices, to endeavour to sheath, blunt, or turn aside; knowing that while this alarming apprehension is present to the soul, he can never maintain possession of it in peace. By such inventions therefore as these, he takes care to furnish the sinner with that which he seeks, and to enable him to walk according to the course of this wicked world and the desires of depraved nature, without being disturbed by such dreadful thoughts. The same on the other hand, is the tendency of all those speculations, of reasoning men, which set God's attributes

at variance with each other; which represent the Supreme Governor as so *weakly* merciful, that he regards neither the demands of his justice, the glory of his holiness, the veracity of his word, nor the peaceable order and subordination of the universe; which explain away all the mysteries of the gospel; and represent sin, that fruitful root of evil, that enemy of God, that favourite of Satan, as a very little thing scarcely noticed by the Almighty; and which, contrary to the Scriptures and universal experience and observation, would persuade us that man is not a depraved creature.

To these latter sentiments I acceded, and maintained them as long as I could; and I did it, most assuredly, because they soothed my conscience, freed me from the intolerable fears of damnation, and enabled me to think favourably of myself. For *these reasons alone* I loved and chose this ground: I fixed myself upon it, and there fortified myself by all the arguments and reasonings I could meet with. These things I wished to believe; and I had my wish, for at length I did most confidently believe them. Being taken captive in this snare by Satan, I should here have perished with a lie in my right hand, had not that Lord, whom I dishonoured, snatched me as a brand from the burning.

In this awful state of mind I attempted to obtain admission into *Holy Orders!* Wrapt up in the proud notion of the dignity of human nature, I had lost sight of the evil of sin, and thought little of my own sinfulness: I was filled with a self-important opinion of my own worth, and the depth of my understanding; and

I had adopted a system of religion accommodated to that foolish pride; having almost wholly discarded mysteries from my creed, and regarding with sovereign contempt those who believe them. As far as I understood such controversies, I was nearly a *Socinian* and *Pelagian*, and wholly an * *Arminian:* yet, to my shame be it spoken, I sought to obtain admission into the ministry, in a church whose doctrines are diametri-

* Possiby some readers may not fully understand the import of these terms: and for their benefit I would observe, that the *Socinians* consider Christ as a mere man, and his death merely as an example of patience and a confirmation of his doctrine, and not as a real atonement, satisfactory to divine justice for man's sins. They deny the Deity and personality of the Holy Ghost, and do not admit that all Christians experience his renewing, sanctifying, and comforting influences; and they generally reject the doctrine of eternal punishments.—The *Pelagians* deny original sin, and explain away the scriptural history of the fall of man. They do not allow the total depravity of human nature, but account for the wickedness of the world from bad examples, habits, and education. They suppose men to possess an ability, both natural and moral, of becoming pious and holy, without a new creation or regeneration of the heart by the Holy Spirit: and they contend for the *freedom of the will*, not only as constituting us voluntary agents, accountable for our conduct, but as it consists in *exemption from the bondage of innate carnal propensities;* so that man has in himself sufficient resources for his recovery to holiness by his own exertions.—The *Arminians* deny the doctrines of gratuitous personal election to eternal life, and of the final perseverance of all true believers: and numbers of them hold the doctrine of justification by works *in part at least;* and verge in some degree to the Pelagian system, in respect of the first moving cause in the conversion of sinners. (5th Ed.)

cally opposed to all the three; without once concerning myself about those barriers which the wisdom of our forefathers have placed around her, purposely to prevent the intrusion of such dangerous heretics as I then was.

While I was preparing for this solemn office, I lived as before, in known sin, and in utter neglect of prayer: my whole preparation consisting of nothing else than an attention to those studies, which were more immediately requisite for reputably passing through the previous examination.

Thus, with a heart full of pride and wickedness; my life polluted with many unrepented unforsaken sins; without one cry for mercy, one prayer for direction or assistance, or a blessing upon what I was about to do; after having concealed my real sentiments under the mask of general expressions; after having subscribed articles directly contrary to what I believed; and after having blasphemously declared, in the presence of God and of the congregation, in the most solemn manner, sealing it with the Lord's supper, that I judged myself to be 'inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take that office upon me,' (not knowing or believing that there was a Holy Ghost;) on *September* the 20th, 1772, I was ordained a *Deacon.*

For ever blessed be the God of all long-suffering and mercy, who had patience with such a rebel and blasphemer; such an irreverent trifler with his Majesty; and such a presumptuous intruder into his sacred ministry! I never think of this daring wickedness

without being filled with amazement that I am out of hell; without adoring that gracious God who permitteth such an atrocious sinner to live, yea, to serve him, and with acceptance I trust to call him Father, and as his minister to speak in his name. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies." May I fervently love, and very humbly and devotedly serve, that God, who hath multiplied his mercies, in abundantly pardoning my complicated provocations!

I had considerable difficulties to surmount in obtaining admission into the ministry, arising from my peculiar circumstances, which likewise rendered my conduct the more inexcusable: and my views, as far as I can ascertain them, were these three.—A desire of a less laborious and more comfortable way of procuring a maintenance, than otherwise I had the prospect of;—the expectation of more leisure to employ in reading, of which I was inordinately fond;—and a proud conceit of my abilities, with a vain-glorious imagination that I should some time distinguish and advance myself in the literary world. These were my ruling motives in taking this bold step: motives as opposite to those which should influence men to enter on this sacred office, as pride is opposite to humility, ambition to contentment in a low estate and a willingness to be the least of all and the servant of all; as

opposite as love of self, of the world, of filthy lucre, and slothful ease, is to the love of God, of souls, and of the laborious work of the ministry. To me therefore be the shame of this heinous sin, and to God be all the glory of over-ruling it for good, I trust, both to unworthy me, and to his dear people, "the church which he hath purchased with his own blood."

My subsequent conduct was suitable to these motives. No sooner was I fixed in a curacy, than with close application I sat down to the study of the learned languages, and such other subjects as I considered most needful, in order to lay the foundation of my future advancement. And, O that I were now as diligent in serving God, as I was then in serving self and ambition! I spared no pains, I shunned, as much as I well could, all acquaintance and diversions, and retrenched from my usual hours of sleep, that I might keep more closely to this business. As a minister, I attended just enough to the publick duties of my station, to support a decent character, which I deemed subservient to my main design; and from the same principle I aimed at morality in my outward deportment, and affected seriousness in my conversation. As to the rest, I still lived in the practice of what I knew to be sinful, and in the entire neglect of all secret religion: if ever inclined to pray, conscious guilt stopped my mouth and I seldom went further than 'God be merciful unto me.'

Perceiving however, that my *Socinian* principles were very disreputable, and being conscious from my own experience that they were unfavourable to mo-

rality, I concealed them in a great measure; both for my credit's sake, and from a sort of desire I entertained, subservient to my main design, of successfully inculcating the practice of the moral duties upon those to whom I preached. My studies indeed lay very little in divinity; but this little all opposed that part of my scheme, which respected the punishment of the wicked in the other world: and therefore, (being now removed to a distance from those books whence I had imbibed my sentiments, and from the reasonings contained in them by which I had learned to defend them,) I began gradually, to be shaken in my former confidence, and once more to be under some apprehension of eternal misery. Being also statedly employed, with the appearance of solemnity, in the public worship of God, whilst I neglected and provoked him in secret, my conscience clamorously reproached me with base hypocrisy: and I began to conclude that, if eternal torments were reserved for any sinners, I certainly should be one of the number. Thus I was again filled with anxious fears and terrifying alarms; especially as I was continually meditating upon what might be the awful consequence, should I be called hence by sudden death. Even my close application to study could not soothe my conscience nor quiet my fears: and under the affected air of cheerfulness I was truly miserable.

This was my state of mind when the change I am about to relate began to take place. How it commenced; in what manner, and by what steps, it proceeded; and how it was completed, will be the sub-

ject of the second part.—I shall conclude this by observing that, though staggered in my favourite sentiment before mentioned, and though my views of the person of Christ were verging towards *Arianism;* yet, in my other opinions I was more confirmed than ever. What those opinions were I have already briefly declared: and they will occur again, and be more fully explained, as I proceed to relate the manner in which I was constrained to renounce them one after another, and to accede to those that were directly contrary to them. Let it suffice to say that I was full of proud self-sufficiency, very positive, and very obstinate: and being situated in the neighbourhood of some of those whom the world calls * *Methodists*, I joined in the prevailing sentiment; held them in sovereign contempt; spoke of them with derision; declaimed against them

* *Methodist, as a stigma of reproach*, was first applied to Mr. Wesley, Mr. Whitfield, and their followers; to those, who professing an attachment to our established Church, and disclaiming the name of Dissenters, were not conformists in point of parochial order, but had separate seasons, places, and assemblies, for worship. The term has since been extended by many to all persons, whether clergy or laity, who preach or profess the doctrines of the reformation, as expressed in the articles and liturgy of our Church. For this fault they must all submit to bear the reproachful name, especially the ministers; nor will the most regular and peaceable compliance with the injunctions of the Rubrick exempt them from it, if they avow the authorized, but in great measure exploded, doctrines to which they have subscribed. My acquaintance hitherto has been solely with Methodists of the latter description; and I have them alone in view when I use the term.

from the pulpit, as persons full of bigotry, enthusiasm, and spiritual pride; laid heavy things to their charge; and endeavoured to prove the doctrines, which I supposed them to hold, (for I had never read their books,) to be dishonourable to God, and destructive to morality. And, though in some companies I chose to conceal part of my sentiments, and in all affected to speak as a friend to universal toleration; yet, scarcely any person can be more proudly and violently prejudiced against both their persons and principles than I then was.

PART II.

A history of the change which took place in the Author's sentiments; with the manner in which, and the means whereby, it was at length affected.

IN *January*, 1774, two of my parishioners, a man and his wife, lay at the point of death. I had heard of the circumstance, but, according to my general custom, not being sent for, I took no notice of it: till one evening the woman being dead and the man dying, I heard that my neighbour Mr. ——— had been several times to visit them. Immediately my conscience reproached me with being shamefully negligent, in sitting at home within a few doors of dying persons, my general hearers, and never going to visit them. Directly it occurred to me, that, whatever contempt I might have for Mr. ———'s doctrines, I

must acknowledge his practice to be more consistent with the ministerial character than my own. He must have more zeal and love for souls than I had, or he would not have walked so far to visit, and supply my lack for care to, those who as far as I was concerned, might have been left to perish in their sins.

This reflection affected me so much, that without delay, and very earnestly, yea, with tears, I besought the Lord to forgive my past neglect: and I resolved thenceforth to be more attentive to this duty; which resolution, though at first formed in ignorant dependence on my own strength, I have by divine grace been enabled hitherto to keep.—I went immediately to visit the survivor; and the affecting sight of one person already dead, and another expiring, in the same chamber, served more deeply to impress my serious convictions: so that from that time I have constantly visited the sick of my parishes, as far as I have had opportunity; and have endeavoured to the best of my knowledge, to perform that essential part of a parish-minister's duty.

Some time after this, a friend recommended to my perusal the conclusion of Bishop *Burnet's* '*History of his own Time*,' especially that part which respects the clergy. It had the intended effect: I was considerably instructed and impressed by it; I was convinced that my entrance into the ministry had been the result of very wrong motives, was preceded by a very unsuitable preparation, and accompanied with very improper conduct. Some uneasiness was also excited in my mind concerning my neglect of the important duties of that high calling: and, though I was enslaved

by sin, and too much engaged in other studies, and in love with this present world, to relinquish my flattering pursuit of reputation and preferment, and change the course of my life, studies, and employments; yet, at intervals, I experienced desires and purposes, of devoting myself at some future period, wholly to the work of the ministry, in the manner to which he exhorts the clergy.

All these things increased the clamorous remonstrances of my conscience; and at this time I lived without any secret religion, because without some reformation in my conduct, as a man and a minister, I did not dare to pray. My convictions would no longer be silenced or appeased; and they became so intolerably troublesome, that I resolved to make one more effort towards amendment. In good earnest, and not totally without seeking the assistance of the Lord by prayer, I now attempted to break the chains with which Satan had hitherto held my soul in bondage; and it pleased the Lord that I should obtain some considerable advantages. Part of my grosser defilements I was enabled to relinquish, and to enter upon a *form of devotion*. *Formal* enough indeed it was in some respects! for I neither knew that Mediator through whom, nor that Spirit by whom, prayers are offered with acceptance unto the Father: yet, though utterly in the dark as to the true and living Way to the throne of grace, I am persuaded there were even then seasons when I was enabled to rise above a mere form, and to offer petitions so far *spiritual* as to be accepted and answered.

I was now somewhat reformed in my outward con-

duct: but the renewing in the spirit of my mind if begun, was scarcely discernable. As my life was externally less wicked and ungodly, my heart grew more proud; the idol *self* was the object of my adoration and obeisance; my worldly advancement was more eagerly sought than ever; some flattering prospects seemed to open, and I resolved to improve my advantages to the uttermost. At the same time every thing tended to increase my good opinion of myself: I was treated with kindness and friendship by persons from whom I had no reason to expect it; my preaching was well received; my acquaintance seemed to be courted; and my foolish heart verily believed that all this and much more was due to my superior worth: while conscience, which, by its mortifying accusations, had been useful to preserve some sense of unworthiness in my mind, was now silenced, or seemed to authorize that pride which it had checked before. And, having the disadvantage of conversing in general with persons, who either favoured my sentiments, or who from good manners, or because they saw it would be in vain, did not contradict me; I concluded that my scheme of doctrine was the exact standard of truth, and that by my superior abilities I was capable of confuting or convincing all who were otherwise minded. In this view of the matter I felt an eager desire of entering into a religious controversy, especially with a *Calvinist:* for many resided in the neighbourhood, and I heard various reports concerning their tenets.

It was at this time that my correspondence with Mr. —— commenced. At a visitation, *May*, 1775, we exchanged a few words on a controverted subject,

in the room among the clergy, which I believe drew many eyes upon us. At that time he prudently declined the discourse; but a day or two after he sent me a short note with a little book for my perusal. This was the very thing I wanted: and I gladly embraced the opportunity which, according to my wishes, seemed now to offer; God knoweth, with no inconsiderable expectations that my arguments would prove irresistibly convincing, and that I should have the honour of rescuing, a well meaning person from his enthusiastical delusions!

I had indeed by this time conceived a very favourable opinion of him, and a sort of respect for him, being acquainted with the character he sustained even among some persons, who expressed a disapprobation of his doctrines. They were forward to commend him as a benevolent, disinterested, inoffensive person, and a laborious minister. But on the other hand, I looked upon his religious sentiments as rank fanaticism; and entertained a very contemptible opinion of his abilities, natural and acquired. Once I had the curiosity to hear him preach; and not understanding his sermon, I made a very great jest of it, where I could do it without giving offence. I had also read one of his publications; but for the same reason, I thought the greater part of it whimsical, paradoxical, and unintelligible.

Concealing therefore, the true motives of my conduct, under the offer of friendship, and a professed desire to know the truth, (which, amidst all my self-sufficiency and prejudice, I trust the Lord had even then given me;) with the greatest affectation of can-

dour, and of a mind open to conviction, I wrote him a long letter; purposing to draw from him such an avowal and explanation of his sentiments, as might introduce a controversial discussion of our religious differences.

The event by no means answered my expectation. He returned a very friendly and long answer to my letter; in which he carefully avoided the mention of those doctrines which he knew would offend me. He declared that he believed me to be one who feared God, and was under the teaching of his Holy Spirit; that he gladly accepted my offer of friendship, and was no ways inclined to dictate to me; but, that leaving me to the guidance of the Lord, he would be glad, as occasion served from time to time, to bear testimony to the truths of the gospel, and to communicate his sentiments to me on any subject, with all the confidence of friendship.

In this manner our correspondence began: and it was continued in the interchange of nine or ten letters, till *December* the same year. Throughout I held my purpose, and he his. I made use of every endeavour to draw him into controversy; and filled my letters with definitions, enquiries, arguments, objections, and consequences, requiring explicit answers. He, on the other hand, shunned every thing controversial as much as possible, and filled his letters with the most useful and least offensive instructions: except that now and then he dropped hints concerning the necessity, the true nature, and the efficacy of faith, and the manner in which it was to be sought and obtained; and concerning some other matters suited, as he

judged, to help me forward in my enquiry after truth. But they much offended my prejudices, afforded me matter of disputation, and at that time were of little use to me.

This however, is certain, that through the whole of the correspondence, I disputed, with all the arguments I could devise, against almost every thing he advanced, and was very much nettled at many things he asserted. I read great part of his letters, and some books which he sent me, with much indifference and contempt. I construed his declining controversy into an acknowledgment of weakness, and triumphed in many companies as having confuted his arguments. And finally when I could not obtain my end, at my instance the correspondence was dropped.

His letters and my answers are now by me; and on a careful perusal of them, compared with all I can recollect concerning this matter, I give this as a faithful account of the correspondence. His letters will, I hope, shortly be made publick, being such as promise greater advantage to others, than, through my proud contentious spirit, I experienced from them. Mine deserve only to be forgotten, except as they are useful to me to remind me what I was, and to mortify my pride: as they illustrate my friend's patience and candour in so long bearing with my ignorance and arrogance; and notwithstanding my unteachable quarrelsome temper, continuing his benevolent labours for my good: and especially as they remind me of the goodness of God, who, though he abominates and resists the proud, yet knows how to bring down the stout heart, not only by the iron rod of his wrath, but by the golden septre of his grace.

Thus our correspondence and acquaintance were for a season almost wholly broken off: for a long time we seldom met, and then only interchanged a few words on general topicks of conversation. Yet he all along persevered in telling me, to my no small offence, that I should accede one day to his religious principles, that he had stood on my ground, and that I should stand on his: and he constantly informed his friends, that though slowly, I was surely, feeling my way to the knowledge of the truth. So clearly could he discern the dawnings of grace in my soul, amidst all the darkness of depraved nature and my obstinate rebellion to the will of God.

This expectation was principally grounded on my conduct in the following circumstance. Immediately after the commencement of our correspondence, in *May*, 1775, whilst my thoughts were much engrossed by some hopes of preferment, one Sunday, during the time of divine service, when the psalm was named, I opened the prayer-book to turn to it: but, (*accidentally* shall I say, or *providentially?*) I opened upon the articles of religion; and the eighth, respecting the authority and warrant of the *Athanasian* creed, immediately engaged my attention. My disbelief of the doctrine of a Trinity of *coequal persons in the unity of the Godhead*, and my pretensions to candour, had both combined to excite my hatred to this creed; for which reasons I had been accustomed to speak of it with contempt, and to neglect reading it officially. No sooner therefore did I read the words, 'That it 'was to be thoroughly received, and believed; for 'that it might be proved by most certain warrants of

'holy Scripture,' than my mind was greatly impressed and affected. The matter of subscription immediately occurred to my thoughts; and from that moment I conceived such scruples about it, that, till my view of the whole system of christianity was entirely changed, they remained insuperable.

It is wisely said by the son of *Sirach*, 'My son, if 'thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for 'temptation.' I had twice before subscribed these articles, with the same religious sentiments I now entertained. But conscience being asleep, and the service of the Lord no part of my concern, I considered subscription as a matter of course, a necessary form, and very little troubled myself about it. But now, though I was greatly influenced by pride, ambition, and the love of the world; yet my heart was sincerely towards the Lord, and I dared not to venture on a known sin, deliberately, for the sake of temporal interest. *Subscription to articles which I did not believe, paid as a price for church-preferment, I began to look upon as an impious lie, a heinous guilt, that could never truly be repented of without throwing back the wages of iniquity.* The more I pondered it, the more strenuously my conscience protested against it. At length, after a violent conflict between interest and conscience, I made known to my patron my scruples, and my determination not to subscribe: thus my views of preferment were deliberately given up, and with an increasing family I was left, as far as mere human prudence could discern, with little other prospect than that of poverty and distress. My objections to the articles were, as I now see, groundless:

much self-sufficiency, undue warmth of temper, and obstinacy were betrayed in the management of this affair, for which I ought to be humbled: but my adherence to the dictates of my conscience, and holding fast my integrity in such trying circumstances, I never did, and I trust never shall, repent.

No sooner was my determination known than I was severely censured by many of my friends. They all, I am sensible, did it from kindness, and they used arguments of various kinds, none of which were suited to produce conviction. But, though I was confirmed in my resolution by the reasonings used to induce me to alter it, they at length were made instrumental in bringing me to this important determination; *not so to believe what any man said, as to take it upon his authority; but to search the word of God with this single intention, to discover whether the articles of the church of England in general, and this creed in particular, were, or were not, agreeable to the Scriptures.* I had studied them in some measure before, for the sake of becoming acquainted with the original languages, and in order thence to bring detached texts to support my own system; and I had a tolerable acquaintance with the historical and preceptive parts of them: but I had not searched this precious repository of divine knowledge, with the *express design of discovering the truth in controverted matters of doctrine.* I had very rarely been troubled with suspicions that I was or might be mistaken: and I now rather thought of becoming better qualified upon scriptural grounds to defend my determination, than of being led to any change of sentiments.

However, I set about the enquiry: and the first passage, as I remember, which made me suspect that I might be wrong, was *James* i. 5. "If any of you "lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all "men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be "given him." On considering these words with some attention, I became conscious that, though I had thought myself wise, yet assuredly I had obtained none of my wisdom in this manner; for I had never offered one prayer to that effect during the whole course of my life. I also perceived that this text contained a suitable direction, and an encouraging promise, in my present enquiry: and from this time, in my poor manner, I began to ask God to give me this promised wisdom.

Shortly after I meditated on, and preached from *John* vii. 16, 17. "My doctrine is not mine, but his "that sent me; if any man will do his will, he shall "know of the doctrine whether it be of God or whe-"ther I speak of myself." I was surprised that I had not before attended to such remarkable words. I discovered that they contained a direction and a promise, calculated to serve as a clue, in extricating the sincere enquirer after truth from that labyrinth of controversy in which, at his first setting out, he is likely to be bewildered. And, though my mind was too much leavened with the pride of reasoning, to reap that benefit from this precious text, which it is capable of affording to the soul that is humbly willing to be taught of God: yet, being conscious that I was disposed to risk every thing in doing what I thought his will, I

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to arise in my mind; to put off the uneasiness occasioned by them, my constant practice was to recollect, as far as I could, all the reasonings and interpretations of Scripture, on the other side of the question: and when this failed of affording satisfaction, I had recourse to controversial writings. This drew me aside from the pure word of God, rendered me more remiss and formal in prayer, and furnished me with defensive armour against my convictions, with fuel for my passions, and food for my pride and self-sufficiency.

At this time *Locke's* '*Reasonableness of Christianity*,' with his '*Vindications*' of it, became my favourite pieces of divinity. I studied this, and many other of Mr. *Locke's* works, with great attention, and a sort of bigotted fondness; taking him almost implicitly for my master, adopting his conclusions, borrowing many of his arguments, and imbibing a dislike to such persons as would not agree with me in partiality for him. This was of great disservice to me; as, instead of getting forward in my enquiry after truth, I thence collected more ingenious and specious arguments with which to defend my mistakes.*

* After having spoken so freely of Mr. Locke's divinity, which I once so highly esteemed, it seems but just to acknowledge the vast obligation, which the whole religious world is under to that great man, for his 'Letters concerning Toleration,' and his answers to those who wrote against them. The grounds of religious liberty, and the reasons why every one should be left to his own choice, to worship God according to his conscience, were, perhaps, never *generally* understood since the foundation of the world; till by these publications Mr. Locke unanswerably made them manifest.

But, one book which I read at this time, because mentioned with approbation by Mr. *Locke*, was of singular use to me: this was Bishop *Burnet's* '*Pastoral Care.*' I found little in it that offended my prejudices, and many things which came home to my conscience respecting my ministerial obligations. I shall lay before the reader a few short extracts, which were most affecting to my own mind. Having mentioned the question proposed to those who are about to be ordained Deacons, 'Do you trust that you are 'inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon 'you this office and ministry, to serve God for the 'promoting of his glory, and the edifying of his people?' he adds, (page 111) 'Certainly the answer that 'is made to this ought to be well considered: for if 'any one says, "I trust so," that yet knows nothing 'of any such motion, and can give no account of it, 'he lies to the Holy Ghost, and makes his first approach to the altar with a lie in his mouth, and that 'not to men, but to God. And again, (page 112) 'Shall not he [God] reckon with those who dare to 'run without his mission, pretending *that they trust* '*they have it*, when perhaps they understand not the 'importance of it; nay, and perhaps some laugh at 'it, as an enthusiastical question, who yet will go 'through with the office! They come to Christ for 'the loaves; they hope to live by the altar and the 'gospel, how little soever they serve at the one, or 'preach the other; therefore they will say any thing 'that is necessary for qualifying them to this, whether 'true or false.'

Again, (page 122) having interwoven a great part of the excellent office of the ordination of Priests, into his argument concerning the importance and weight of the work of the ministry; he adds, 'Upon the 'whole matter, either this is all a piece of gross and 'impudent pageantry, dressed up in grave and lofty 'expressions, to strike upon the weaker part of man-'kind, and to furnish the rest with matter to their 'profane and impious scorn; or it must be confessed 'that Priests come under the most formal and express 'engagements to constant and diligent labour, that 'can be possibly contrived or set forth in words.'— He concludes this subject, (of the ordination offices,) by exhorting all candidates for orders to read them frequently and attentively, during the time of their preparation; that they may be aware before-hand of the obligations they are about so solemnly to enter into; and to peruse them at least four times in a year, ever after their ordination, to keep in their minds a continual remembrance of their important engagements. How necessary this counsel is, every minister, or candidate for the ministry, must determine for himself: for my part, I had never once read through the office when I was ordained, and was in great measure a stranger to the obligations I was about to enter into, till the very period; nor did I ever afterwards attend to it, till this advice put me upon it. The shameful negligence and extreme absurdity of my conduct in this respect are too glaring, not to be perceived with self-application, by every one who has been guilty of a similar omission. I would therefore only just men-

tion, that hearty earnest prayer to God, for his guidance, help, and blessing, may be suitably recommended, as a proper attendant on such a perusal of our obligations.

Again, (page 147,) he thus speaks of a wicked clergyman: 'His whole life has been a course of 'hypocrisy in the strictest sense of the word, which 'is the acting of a part, and the counterfeiting another 'person. His sins have in them all possible aggra-'vations: they are against knowledge, and against 'vows, and contrary to his character; they carry in 'them a deliberate contempt of all the truths and obli-'gations of religion; and if he perishes, he doth not 'perish alone, but carries a shoal down with him, 'either of those who have perished in ignorance through 'his neglect, or of those who have been hardened in 'their sins through his ill example!—Again, (page 183) having copiously discoursed on the studies befitting ministers, especially the study of the Scriptures, he adds, 'But to give all these their full effect, a Priest 'that is much in his study, ought to employ a great 'part of his time in secret and fervent prayer, for the 'direction and blessing of God in his labours, for the 'constant assistance of his Holy Spirit, and for a lively 'sense of divine matters; that so he may feel the im-'pressions of them grow deep and strong upon his 'thoughts: this, and this only, will make him go on 'with his work without wearying, and be always re-'joicing in it.'

But the chief benefit which accrued to me from the perusal was this:—I was excited by it to an attentive consideration of those passages of Scripture, that state

the obligations and duties of a minister, which hitherto I had not observed, or to which I had very *loosely* attended. In particular, (it is yet fresh in my memory,) I was greatly affected with considering the charge of precious souls committed to me, and the awful account one day to be rendered of them, in meditating on *Ezekiel* xxxiii. 7—9. "So thou, O "son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the "house of *Israel:* therefore thou shalt hear the word "at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I "say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt "surely die: if thou dost not speak to warn the "wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in "his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine "hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his "way, to turn from it; if he do not turn from his "way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast "delivered thy soul." For I was fully convinced, with Bishop *Burnet*, that every minister is as much concerned in this solemn warning as the prophet himself.—*Acts* xx. 17—35, was another portion of Scripture which by means of this book was brought home to my conscience; especially ver. 26, 27, 28, which serve as an illustration of the preceding Scripture: "Wherefore I take you to record this day that "I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have "not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of "God. Take heed therefore, unto yourselves, and "to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath "made you overseers, to feed the church of God "which he hath purchased with his own blood."

In short, I was put upon the attentive and repeated

perusal of the *Epistles* to *Timothy* and *Titus*, as containing the sum of a minister's duty in all ages. I searched out and carefully considered every text I could find in the whole Scripture which referred to this argument. I was greatly impressed by 1 *Cor.* ix. 16. "For necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is "me if I preach not the Gospel." Nor was I less struck with *Coloss.* iv. 17. "Say to *Archippus*, take "heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the "Lord, that thou fulfil it." This was brought to my conscience with power, as if the apostle had in person spoken the words *to me*. But especially I was both instructed and encouraged by meditating upon 1 *Peter* v. 2—4. "Feed the flock of God which is among "you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, "but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready "mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, "but being ensamples to the flock: and when the chief "Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of "glory that fadeth not away."

I hope the reader will excuse my prolixity in speaking on this subject, because in itself it is very important: and though I obtained no new views of gospel-truth from *The Pastoral Care*, yet I received such a deep conviction of the difficulty and importance of that work in which I had thoughtlessly engaged, and of the imminent danger to which my soul would be exposed, should I neglect to devote myself wholly to it; as laid the foundation of all my subsequent conduct and change of sentiments. I was indeed, guilty of very criminal procrastination, after I had been thus convinced; and being engaged more than I ought in

other matters, I for some time postponed and neglected complying with the dictates of my conscience. But I never lost sight of the instruction I had received, nor ever enjoyed any comfortable reflection, till, having broken off all other engagements, I had given myself up to those studies and duties which pertain to the work of the ministry. And I have cause to bless God, that this book ever came in my way.

Still, however, my self-confidence was very little abated, and I had made no progress in acquiring the knowledge of the truth. I next read *Tillotson's* sermons, and *Jortin's* works: and, my time being otherwise engaged, I for a while gave into the indolent custom of transcribing their discourses, with some alterations, to preach to my people. This precluded free meditations on the word of God, and led me to take up my opinions on trust. My preaching was in general that smooth palatable mixture of law and gospel, which corrupts both; by representing the gospel, as a *mitigated law*, and as accepting *sincere* instead of *perfect* obedience. This system, by flattering pride and prejudice, and soothing the conscience, pleases the careless sinner and self-righteous formalist, but does real good to none; and is in fact a specious and unsuspected kind of Antinomianism.

About this time I foolishly engaged in a course of diversion and visiting, more than I had done since my ordination: this unfitted me for secret prayer and close meditation, and rendered the Scriptures, and other religious studies, insipid and irksome to me, (a never-failing consequence of every vain compliance with the world.) For a season, therefore, my ardour was

damped, my anxiety banished, and my enquiries retarded. I was not, however, permitted entirely to drop my religious pursuits: generally I made it a rule to read something in the Scriptures every day, and to perform a task of daily devotion; but in both I was very formal and lifeless.

Yet not long after, I was engaged in earnest meditation on our Lord's discourse with *Nicodemus* (*John* iii.) I felt an anxious desire to understand this interesting portion of Scripture; especially to know what it was to be "born again," or "born of the Spirit," which in five verses our Saviour hath three times declared absolutely necessary to salvation. I was convinced it was absurd to suppose that such strong expressions implied no more than baptism with water. *Tillotson's* controversial sermons on this subject afforded me no satisfaction. Some great and total change I supposed to be intended, not only in the behaviour, but also in the heart. But not having clearly experienced that change, I could not understand in what it consisted. However, having offered some poor prayers for divine teaching, I undertook to preach upon it: but I talked very darkly, employed a considerable part of my time in declaiming against visionaries and enthusiasts, and reaped very little benefit from it. Yet I was so well satisfied with my performance, that, in the course of my correspondence with Mr. ————, I sent him these sermons for his perusal: and he, in return, sent me some of his own upon the same subject. But, though sincerely desirous to understand our Lord's meaning in this important point, I was too proud to be taught by *him;*

middle doctrine; namely, 'that the Son and Holy Ghost, however exalted, or dignified with names and titles, must either be *mere creatures*, or that otherwise there must be three Gods.' Not perceiving this, and my newly acquired reverence for Scripture and my old self-confidence and fondness for reasoning being, by this conciliating scheme, both humoured; I cordially acceded to his sentiments, and for a long time could not endure any other doctrine.

Nothing further of any consequence occurred till about *December* 1776, when, carelessly taking up Mr. *Law's* '*Serious Call*,' a book I had hitherto treated with contempt, I had no sooner opened it, than I was struck with the originality of the work, and the spirit and force of argument with which it is written, I mean merely as to his management of the subjects he treats of: for there are many things in it, that I am very far from approving; and it certainly contains as little *gospel* as any religious work I am acquainted with. But, though a very uncomfortable book, to a person who is brought under a serious concern for his soul, and deep convictions of sin; it is very useful to prepare the way, to shew the need we have of a Saviour, and to enforce the practice of that holy diligence in the use of means, which the important interests of eternity reasonably demand. This was its use to me. By the perusal of it I was convinced that I was guilty of great remissness and negligence; that the duties of secret devotion called for far more of my time and attention, than had been hitherto allotted to them; and that, if I hoped to save my own soul, and the souls of those that heard me, I must in this respect greatly alter my con-

duct and increase my diligence in seeking and serving the Lord. From that time I began to study in what manner my devotions might be rendered more fervent and pertinent; transcribed, and committed to memory, scriptural petitions; I employed some time in reading manuals of devotion, made attempts to compose prayers myself, and became more *frequent* and *earnest*, and, I trust, more *spiritual*, than heretofore, in my secret addresses to the Majesty of heaven.

About this time, after many delays, I complied with the admonitions of my conscience, and disengaged myself from all other employments; with a solemn resolution to leave all my temporal concerns in the hands of the Lord, and entirely to devote myself to the work of the ministry. Being thus become master of all my time, I dropped every other study, and turned the whole current of my reflections and enquiries into another channel; and for several years I scarcely opened a book which treated of any thing besides religion.

The first step I took, after this disengagement, was to keep *common-place books:* one I had for noting down remarkable passages out of other authors; and another for collecting into one view every text I could meet with in Scripture, respecting the most important and controverted doctrines of the gospel. Though I held this but a short time, (for when my engagements multiplied I dropt it;) yet I found it very useful, in bringing me acquainted with many passages of the word of God, to which I had not hitherto much attended; and it prepared the way for penning my sermons, on doctrinal subjects, with the scriptural testi-

monies concerning the point in hand, in one view before me.

In *January*, 1777, I met with a very high commendation of Mr. *Hooker's* writings, in which the honourable appellation of *Judicious* was bestowed upon him. This excited my curiosity to read his works; which accordingly I did with great profit. In his '*Discourse of Justification*,' (Edit. 1682, page 496,) I met with the following remarkable passage, which, as well for its excellency, as for the effect it had upon my religious views, I shall, though rather long, transcribe.—'If our hands did never offer violence to our 'brethren, a bloody thought doth prove us murderers 'before him [God.] If we had never opened our 'mouth to utter any scandalous, offensive, or hurtful 'word, the cry of our secret cogitations is heard in 'the ears of God. If we did not commit the sins, 'which daily and hourly, in deed, word, or thoughts, 'we do commit; yet in the good things which we do, 'how many defects are there intermingled! God, in 'that which is done, respecteth the mind and intention of the doer. Cut off then all those things wherein we have regarded our own glory, those things which 'men do to please men, and to satisfy our own liking; 'those things which we do by any respect, not sincerely, and purely for the love of God; and a small score 'will serve for the number of our righteous deeds. Let 'the holiest and best thing we do be considered:— 'we are never better affected unto God than when we 'pray;—yet, when we pray, how are our affections 'many times distracted! how little reverence do we 'show unto the grand Majesty of God unto whom 'we speak! how little remorse of our own miseries!

'how little taste of the sweet influence of his tender 'mercies do we feel! Are we not as unwilling many 'times to begin, and as glad to make an end, as if in 'saying, "Call upon me," he had set us a very bur- 'thensome task? It may seem somewhat extreme 'which I will speak; therefore let every one judge of 'it, even as his own heart shall tell him, and no other- 'wise. I will but only make a demand: if God should 'yield unto us, not, as unto *Abraham*, if fifty, forty, 'thirty twenty, yea or if ten, good persons could be 'found in a city, for their sakes the city should not be 'destroyed; but, and if he should make us an offer thus 'large:—Search all the generations of men, since the 'fall of our father *Adam;* find one man, that hath 'done one action, which hath passed from him pure, 'without any stain or blemish at all; and, for that 'one only man's action, neither men nor angels shall 'feel the torments which are prepared for both: do 'you think that this ransom, to deliver men and 'angels, could be found to be among the sons of men? 'The best things, which we do have somewhat in 'them to be pardoned; how then can we do any thing 'meritorious, or worthy to be rewarded? Indeed God 'doth liberally promise whatsoever appertaineth to a 'blessed life to as many as sincerely keep his law, 'though they be not exactly able to keep it. Where- 'fore we acknowledge a dutiful necessity of doing 'well, but the meritorious dignity of doing well we 'utterly renounce. We see how far we are from the 'perfect righteousness of the law: the little fruit which 'we have in holiness, it is, God knoweth, corrupt 'and unsound: we put no confidence at all in it; we

'challenge nothing in the world for it; we dare not 'call God to reckoning, as if we had him in our debt-'books. Our continual suit to him is, and must be, 'to bear with our infirmities, and pardon our offences.'

I had no sooner read this passage, than I acquired such an insight into the strictness and spirituality of the divine law, and the perfection which a just and holy God, according to that law, cannot but require in all the services of his reasonable creatures; that I clearly perceived my very best duties, on which my main dependance had hitherto been placed, to be merely specious sins; and my whole life appeared to be one continued series of transgression. I now understood the apostle's meaning, when he affirms, that "By the works of the law can no flesh be justified before God." All my difficulties in this matter vanished; all my distinctions, and reasonings, about the meaning of the words *law* and *justification*, with all my borrowed criticisms upon them, failed me at once. I could no longer be thus amused; for I was convinced, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that all men were so notoriously transgressors of every law of God, that no man could possibly be justified in his sight by his obedience to any of the divine commandments. I was sensible that if God should call me into judgment before him, according to the strictness of his perfect law, for the best duty I ever performed, and for nothing else, I must be condemned as a transgressor: for when weighed in these exact balances, it would be found wanting. Thus I was effectually convinced, that, if ever I were saved, it must be in some way of unmerited mercy and grace, though I did not clearly under-

stand in what way till long after. Immediately, therefore, I took for my text, *Gal.* iii. 22. "But the Scrip-
" ture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise,
" by faith of Jesus Christ, might be given to them
" that believe." And I preached from it according to *Hooker's* doctrine; expressing, as strongly as I could, the defilements of our best actions, and our need of mercy in every thing we do; in order the more evi-
" dently to shew that " salvation is of grace, through
" faith;—not of works, lest any man should boast."

I had not, however, as yet attained to a knowledge of the foulness of that fountain, whence all these polluted streams flow forth so plentifully into our lives and conversation.—Neither was I then able to receive the following nervous passage concerning justification (*Hooker*, page 495): The righteousness wherein we
' must be found, if we will be justified, is not our own;
' therefore we cannot be justified by any inherent
' quality. Christ hath merited righteousness for as
' many as are found in him. In him God findeth us,
' if we be faithful: for by faith we are incorporated
' into Christ. Then, although in ourselves we be al-
' together sinful and unrighteous, yet, even the man
' which is impious in himself, full of iniquity, full of
' sin; him, being found in Christ through faith, and
' having his sin remitted through repentance, him God
' upholdeth with a gracious eye, putteth away his sin
' by not imputing it; taketh quite away the punishment
' due thereunto by pardoning it; and accepteth him
' in Jesus Christ as perfectly righteous, as if he had
' fulfilled all that was commanded him in the law.
' Shall I say, *more* perfectly righteous than if himself

'had fulfilled the whole law? I must take heed what 'I say; but the apostle saith, *God made Him to be* '*sin, for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made* '*the righteousness of God in him.*" 'Such we are in 'the sight of God the Father, as is the very Son of 'God himself. Let it be counted folly, or frenzy, or 'fury, whatsoever, it is our comfort, and our wisdom; 'we care for no knowledge in the world but this, that 'man hath sinned, and God hath suffered; that God 'hath made himself the Son of man, and that men are 'made the righteousness of God."

Equally determinate and expressive are these words (page 500): 'As for such as hold with the Church of '*Rome*, that we cannot be saved by Christ alone with-'out works, they do, not only by a circle of consequence, 'but directly, deny the foundation of faith; they hold 'it not, no not so much as by a thread.' If the *judici-ous* Hooker's judgment may in this important concern be depended upon, (and I suppose it will not easily be proved erroneous,) I fear the foundation of faith is held by only a small part of that Church, which has honoured her champion with this distinction.

Page 508 and 509, he thus defends his doctrine against the objections of the *Papists*, (for at that time none but the *Papists*, openly objected to it.) It 'is a childish cavil wherewith, in the matter of justi-'fication, our adversaries do so greatly please them-'selves, exclaiming that we tread all christian virtues under our feet, and require nothing of christians but 'faith; because we teach that faith alone justifieth. 'Whereas, by this speech, we never meant to ex-'clude either hope, or charity, from being always

'joined, as inseparable mates with faith in the man 'that is justified; or works from being added as ne-'cessary duties required at the hands of every justi-'fied man: but to shew that faith is the only hand 'which putteth on Christ unto justification; and 'Christ the only garment, which, being so put on, 'covereth the shame of our defiled natures, hideth the 'imperfections of our works, preserveth us blameless 'in the sight of God; before whom, otherwise, the 'weakness of our faith were cause sufficient to make 'us culpable; yea, to shut us from the kingdom of 'heaven, where nothing that is not absolute can en-'ter.

Had I at this time met with such passages in the writings of the *Dissenters*, or in any of those modern publications, which, under the brand of *methodistical*, are condemned without reading, or perused with invincible prejudice, I should not have thought them worth regard, but should have rejected them as wild enthusiasm. But I knew that *Hooker* was deemed perfectly orthodox, and a standard-writer, by the prelates of the church in his own days. I learned from his dispute with Mr. *Travers*, that he was put upon his defence, for making concessions in this matter to the Church of *Rome*, which the zealous *Protestants* did not think warrantable; and that he was judged by the more rigid too lax in his doctrine, by none too rigid. I had never heard it insinuated that he was tinctured with enthusiasm; and the solidity of his judgment, and the acuteness of his reasoning faculties, need no voucher to the attentive reader. His opinion therefore carried great weight with it; made me suspect

the truth of my former sentiments; and put me upon serious enquiries and deep meditation upon this subject, accompanied with earnest prayers for the teaching and direction of the Lord in this important point. The result was, that after many objections and doubts, and much examination of the word of God, in a few months I began to accede to Mr. *Hooker's* sentiments. And at the present my opinion in this respect, as far as I know, coincides with these passages of this eminent author, and is supported and vindicated by the same arguments: he, therefore, who would prove our doctrine of *justification by faith alone* to be an error, will do well to answer in the first place these quotations from Mr. *Hooker*.

Indeed, as far as I can understand him, there is scarcely any doctrine which, with no inconsiderable offence, I now preach, that is not as evidently contained in his writings as in my sermons. Witness particularly his '*Sermon of the certainty and perpe-*' *tuity of faith in the elect;*' in which the doctrine of the final perseverance of true believers, is expressly taught and scripturally maintained: and he closes it with this noble triumph of full assurance, as resulting from that comfortable doctrine in the hearts of confirmed and experienced christians; "I know in whom "I have believed;" 'I am not ignorant whose preci-' ous blood has been shed for me; I have a Shepherd ' full of kindness, full of care, and full of power: unto ' him I commit myself. His own finger hath engra-' ven this sentence in the tables of my heart. "*Satan* "*hath desired to winnow thee as wheat, but I have* ' *prayed that thy faith fail not.*" Therefore, the as-

'surance of my hope I will labour to keep as a jewel 'unto the end, and by labour,' through the gracious 'mediation of his prayer, I shall keep it.' (Page 532) With such words in my mouth, and such assurance in my heart, I wish to live, and hope to die.

The insertion of these quotations from this old author will, I hope, need no apology. Many have not his works, and these extracts are worthy of their perusal: others, from these specimens, may be prevailed with to read what perhaps hath hitherto been an unnoticed book in their studies. Especially I recommend it to those, who admire him as the champion of the external order and discipline of the church, and who willingly allow him the honour of being distinguished by the epithet *Judicious*, that they would attentively read and impartially consider his doctrine. This would put an effectual stop to those declamations that, either ignorantly or maliciously, are made against the very doctrines as novel inventions, which have just now been explained and defended in Mr. *Hooker's* own words. For my part, though I acknowledge that he advances many things I should be unwilling to subscribe, yet I heartily bless God that at this time I read him: the first material alteration, that took place in my views of the gospel, being in consequence of it.

One more quotation I shall make, and so take my leave of him. Addressing himself (in his 2d. *Ser-* 'mon on part of St. Jude's *Epistle*,') to the pastors who are appointed to feed the chosen in Israel, he says (Page 552,) if there be any feeling of Christ, any 'drop of heavenly dew, or any spark of God's good Spirit within you, stir it up; be careful to build and

'edify, first yourselves and then your flocks, in this 'most holy faith. I say, *first yourselves;* for he, 'which will set the hearts of other men on fire with 'the love of Christ, must himself burn with love. It 'is want of faith in ourselves, my brethren, which 'makes us retchless [careless] in building others. 'We forsake the Lord's inheritance, and feed it not. 'What is the reason of this? Our own desires are 'settled where they should not be. We ourselves 'are like those women which have a longing to eat 'coals, and lime, and filth: we are fed, some with 'honour, some with ease, some with wealth: the 'gospel waxeth loathsome and unpleasant in our 'taste; how should we then have a care to feed others 'with that which we cannot fancy ourselves? If faith 'wax cold and slender in the heart of the prophet, it 'will soon perish from the ears of the people.'—It is not needful to add any reflections upon this passage, every one will readily make them for himself: we are however, reminded of *Solomon's* words, (*Eccl.* i. 9, 10.) "There is no new thing under the sun; is "there any thing whereof it may be said, see this is "new? It hath been already of old time which was "before us." (*Eccl.* iii. 15.) "That which hath "been is now, and that which is to be hath already "been."

To my shame be it spoken, though I had twice subscribed the *Articles*, which allow the book of *Homilies* to be sound and wholsome doctrine, I had never yet seen them, and understood not what that doctrine was. But, being at length engaged in a serious enquiry after truth, and *Hooker's* works hav-

ing given me a more favourable opinion of these old authors, I was inclined to examine them, and I read part of the book with some degree of attention. And though many things seemed hard sayings that I could not receive, yet others were made very useful to me, especially concerning justification. In short, I perceived that the very doctrine, which I had hitherto despised as methodistical, was indisputably the standard-doctrine of the established church, when the homilies were composed: and consequently that it is so still; for they have lost none of their authority, (however fallen into disrepute,) with those who subscribe the thirty-nine articles. This weakened my prejudice, though it did not prove the doctrine true.

About this time a new and unexpected effect was produced by my preaching.—I had hitherto been satisfied to see people regularly frequent the church, listen attentively to what was discoursed, and lead moral decent lives. The way in which I had been led was so smooth, and the progress I had made so gradual; I had lately experienced so little *distressing* concern for my own soul, and had so little acquaintance with persons conversant in these matters; that while I declared the strictness, spirituality, and sanction of the law of God in an alarming manner, it never occurred to me that my hearers might not proceed in the same easy gradual way. But I had scarcely begun this new method of preaching, when application was made to me by persons in great distress about their souls; for, their consciences being awakened to a sense of their lost condition by nature and practice, they were anxious in enquiring what they must do to

be saved? I knew not well what to say to them, my views being greatly clouded, and my sentiments concerning justification very much perplexed; but, being willing to give them the best counsel I could, I exhorted them in a general way to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; though I was incapable of instructing them either concerning the true nature of faith, or in what manner they were to seek it. However, I better understood my own meaning, when I advised them to the study of the Scriptures, accompanied with prayer to God to be enabled rightly to understand them; and when I inculcated amendment of life. In this manner the Lord slowly brought them forwards: and though, for want of a better instructor, they were a considerable time before they arrived at establishment in the faith; yet some of them, having their minds less leavened with prejudice and the pride of reasoning, were more apt scholars in the school of Christ than I was, and got the start of me in the knowledge both of doctrine and duty; and in their turns became, without intending it, in some respects monitors to me, and I derived important advantage from them.

This singular circumstance, of being an instrument in bringing others earnestly and successfully to enquire after salvation, while I so little understood the true gospel of Jesus Christ, very much increased my perplexity. I became doubly earnest to know the truth, lest I should mislead those, who confided their precious souls to me as their spiritual instructor. This added to my diligence in reading and meditating on the word of God; and made me more fervent in prayer to be guided to the knowledge of the truth. And

under every difficulty, I constantly had recourse unto the Lord, to preserve me from ignorance and error, and to enable me to distinguish between the doctrines of his word, and the inventions and traditions of men.

About this time, I established a weekly Lecture for expounding the scriptures in my other parish, by which I obtained further acquaintance with the various parts of the word of God. It was my general practice, in penning these Lectures, to search out all the texts referred to in the margin of the Bible, with such as I could recollect upon the subject, and to make use of them in explaining each other. This method enabled me to store my memory with the language of Scripture; and made way for a greater exactness in discussing doctrinal subjects than I had hitherto been acquainted with.

In the course of the winter, 1777, I was engaged in deep meditation upon *Luke* xi. 9—13, concerning the Holy Spirit being given in answer to prayer. And at length, having made a collection of all the Scriptures I could meet with which related to that important doctrine, diligently comparing them together, and meditating upon them, and earnestly beseeching the Lord to fulfil the promise to my soul, I wrote two sermons upon the subject; one from *Luke* xi. 13: "If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts "unto your children, how much more shall your "heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that "ask him:" The other from *James* i. 16, 17; "Do not err, my beloved brethren, every good gift, "and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh "down from the Father of lights." Thus my views

of a christian's privileges and duties in this respect were much enlarged, and my requests were made known unto the Lord in a more full, exact, and believing manner than before. Though I still remained very ignorant in many important matters respecting the person, offices, and work, of the Holy Ghost; yet I had discovered more of what was promised concerning him, and therefore knew better what to ask.

My obligations to Bishop *Beveridge* must here be acknowledged.—When I first began to peruse his sermons, I conceived a mean opinion of him; and it was some time before I could prevail with myself to examine any further into his writings: but being now more advanced in my enquiry after truth, those singularities which at first offended me became tolerable, and I began to relish the simplicity, spirituality, love of Christ, and affection for souls, which eminently shine forth in many parts of his works. Indeed, I received considerable instruction from him; but especially his sermon on the real satisfaction made by the death of Christ for the sins of believers, was the blessed means of clearing up my views, and confirming my faith, respecting that fundamental doctrine of Christianity. On *Good Friday*, 1777, I preached a sermon upon that subject, from *Isaiah* liii. 6. "All "we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned "every one to his one way, and the Lord hath laid "[hath caused to meet] on him the iniquities of us "all." I endeavoured to prove, (what has ever since been the sole foundation of all my hopes,) that Christ indeed bare the sins of all who should ever truly believe, in all their guilt, condemnation, and deserved

punishment, in his own body on the tree. I explicitly avowed my belief, that Christ, as our Surety and Bondsman, stood in our law-place, to answer all our obligations, and to satisfy divine justice and the demands of the law for our offences: and I publickly renounced as erroneous, and grievous perversions of Scripture, all my former explanations and interpretations of these subjects.

This was the first doctrine in which I was clearly and fully brought to acknowledge the truth; though I had with no little earnestness for two years been enquiring about it; to so astonishing a degree was my blinded understanding filled with prejudice against the doctrines of the word of God! Hitherto they had been foolishness to me; but now under the divine teaching I began, though *very dimly*, to discern the wisdom of God in them.

I say *dimly;* for I was still under many and great mistakes, and very ignorant in many important points. —I knew sin to be the transgression of the divine law; but I did not perceive its odious deformity, as deliberate rebellion against God's sovereign authority, and an express contradiction to his holy nature; as charging God foolishly, with the want of either wisdom or goodness, in laying such restraints upon the inclinations of his creatures; and as tending to overturn all subordination in the universe, and to introduce anarchy, confusion, and misery into the whole creation. I had discovered that my best *actions* were defiled; but I understood not that this was the effect of a depraved nature, and a polluted heart. The doctrine of original sin, as the fruitful root of these mul-

tiplied evils, was as yet no part of my creed. Inconsistently I was an *Arian* or a *Clarkist*, in my sentiments concerning the person of Christ, and the divinity of the Holy Ghost. Some faint conceptions I had formed of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the soul; the beginnings of it I little understood: and I continued to entertain an implacable enmity to the doctrine of election, and the truths more intimately connected with it. But my faith was now fixed upon a crucified Saviour, (though I dishonoured his person, and denied his Deity,) and I had a sincere desire of being devoted to the Lord. He therefore in mercy accepted his own work in my heart, and pardoned all that was mine; and at length extricated me from that labyrinth of perplexities and inconsistencies in which I was entangled.

About this time in the course of my lectures, our Lord's discourse with *Nicodemus* came again under my consideration. Notwithstanding much meditation and many prayers, I could not satisfy my mind about it. I was convinced some internal change must be implied in the expressions, "born again," and "born "of the Spirit:" and, according to what I had experienced, I endeavoured to explain it; but I was still very confused in my views of that important subject, and had many doubts whether I were right or wrong in what I advanced.

Hitherto, excepting *Leland* '*On the Deistical Writers*,' I had not read any book written by a *Dissenter*, with the least degree of candour and attention; but at this crisis I met with the first volume of Dr. *Evans's* sermons, entitled '*The Christian Temper*.' I was

induced to read it by the recommendation of a friend; but (such was my proud foolish heart) I opened it with great prejudice because I understood that the author was a *Dissenter!* However, this book came with a blessing; for by perusing it I at length perceived that fallen man, both body and soul, is indeed carnal and sold under sin; that by nature in every man living the reasonable and immortal part is destitute of *spirituality*, immersed in matter, and, by a dishonourable and miserable prostitution, given up "to make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts "thereof;" and, that man must be renewed in the spirit of his mind, new-created unto good works, born of the spirit of God, made partaker of a new and divine nature, before he can possibly be made meet for, or admitted into, the kingdom of God. In a very little time all my difficulties about this matter vanished, and the truth became so exceedingly plain and evident, that, until I had made the experiment, I could scarcely be persuaded but that every person, who heard it rightly explained, must assent to it.—This doctrine I have ever since invariably preached, with good effect, I trust, in opening the eyes of sinners, and "turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." (*Acts* xxvi. ~~28.~~) 18

When I had made this little progress in seeking the truth, my acquaintance with Mr. ——— was resumed. From the conclusion of our correspondence in *December*, 1775, till *April*, 1777, it had been almost wholly dropped. To speak plainly, I did not care for his company; I did not mean to make any use of him as an instructor; and I was unwilling the

world should think us in any way connected. But under discouraging circumstances, I had occasion to call upon him: and his discourse so comforted and edified me, that my heart, being by his means relieved from its burden, became susceptible of affection for him. From that time I was inwardly pleased to have him for my friend; though not as now rejoiced to *call* him so. I had, however, even at that time, no thoughts of learning doctrinal truth from him, and was ashamed to be detected in his company: but I sometimes stole a way to spend an hour with him. About the same period, I once heard him preach; but still it was foolishness to me, his sermon being principally upon the believer's experience, in some particulars with which I was unacquainted: so that though I loved and valued him, I considered him as a person misled by enthusiastical notions; and strenuously insisted that we should never think alike till we met in heaven.

All along in the progress of this enquiry, I grew more and more concerned about my character. I saw myself continually verging nearer and nearer to that scheme of doctrine, which the world calls *Methodism*; nor could I help it without doing violence to my convictions. I had indeed set out with the *avowed*, and I trust *sincere*, resolution of seeking the truth as impartially as possible; and of embracing it wherever I might find it, without respect to interest, reputation, or any worldly consideration whatever. I had taken patiently, and sustained comfortably, the loss of my opening prospect of preferment, I trust chiefly from the supports of grace, and the consciousness of having acted with integrity; but I am not sure but my de-

ceitful heart might also derive some support, from a vain imagination that my character would be no loser. Ambitious thirst after the praise of men was much more my peculiar corruption than covetousness: and I had been in no ordinary degree proud of my natural understanding. I had been accustomed to hear the people called *Methodists* mentioned with contempt, as ignorant and deluded, as fools, and sometimes as madmen: and with no small degree of complacency and self-preference, I too had despised them as weak enthusiasts. But I now began to be apprehensive, that the tables were about to be turned upon me. If I professed and taught these doctrines, I must no longer be considered as a man of sober understanding: but as one of those persons, whose heads, being naturally weak, had been turned by religious studies; and who, having fallen under the power of enthusiasm, had become no better than fools or madmen.

This was the sharpest trial I passed through: for I had not yet learned, that "when we are reproached "for the name of Christ, happy are we." Nor did I remember, with due consideration of the reasons assignable for so extraordinary a circumstance, that the apostles were fools for Christ's sake;" were deemed "beside themselves;" and went "through evil report "and good report, as deceivers, and yet true;" that they were "every where spoken against," as the men that turned the world upside down;" were treated as "vain babblers," and "accounted the filth of "the world, and the offscouring of all things." I did not consider that Jesus himself, "the brightness of the "Father's glory," the Word and Wisdom of God,"

who, "went about doing good," and "spake as "never man spake," was not only rejected, but despised as not worth hearing, as "one that had a devil," as in league with the devil, as "a blasphemer," a *Sa-* "*maritan*," "a madman," yea, "a devil."

I read indeed, but my understanding was not yet opened to understand, such plain Scriptures as these, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his "own; but because ye are not of the world, but I "have chosen you out of the world, *therefore* the "world hateth you. Remember the word that I said "unto you: The servant is not greater than his Lord; "if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute "you." (*John* xv. 19, 20.) "The disciple is not above "his master, nor the servant above his Lord. If they "have called the master of the house *Beelzebub*, how "much more shall they call them of the household?" "(*Matt.* x. 24, 25.) Blessed are ye when men shall "revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all man- "ner of evil against you *falsely*, for my sake. Rejoice, "and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in "heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets that were "before you." (*Matt.* v. 11, 12.) Not being aware of these consequences when my resolution was first formed, I was as one who has begun to build without counting the cost, and was greatly disturbed when I saw the favourite idol of my proud heart, my character, in such imminent danger.

It must be supposed that this apprehension would make me cautious what doctrines I admitted into my creed; and unwilling to be convinced that those things were true and important, the profession of which was

sure to bring infamy on my character: and that even after the fullest conviction, I should thus be rendered very careful in what manner I preached them. In general, however, though the conflict was sharp, I was enabled to be faithful. The words "Necessity "is laid upon me; yea, woe is me if I preach not "the gospel," were commonly upon my mind when I wrote my sermon, and when I entered the pulpit: and though, when a bold declaration of what I believed to be the truth, with an offensive application of it to the consciences of my hearers, drew opposition and calumny upon me, I have secretly resolved to be more circumspect the next time; yet, when that time came, my heart and conscience being both engaged, I dared not to conceal one tittle of what appeared to me to be true, and to promise usefulness. But while, with perturbation of mind, and with many disquieting apprehensions, I declared the message with which I supposed myself to be entrusted; to screen myself from the charge of *Methodism* and to soften the offence, I was frequently throwing out slighting expressions, and bringing the charge of enthusiasm, against those who preached such doctrines as I was not yet convinced of. On the other hand, my concern about my character quickened me very much in prayer, and increased my diligence in searching the Scriptures, that I might be sure I was not, at this expence, preaching "cunningly devised fables," instead of feeding the souls committed to my care with the unadulterated milk of evangelical truth.

In this state of mind, which is more easily understood by experience than description, I met with Mr.

Venn's Essay on the Prophecy of Zacharias, (Luke i. 67—79.) I was no stranger to the character he bore in the world, and did not begin to read his book with great alacrity or expectation: however, the interesting subjects treated of engaged my attention, and I read it with great seriousness, and some degree of impartiality. I disapproved indeed of many things: but the truth and importance of others brought conviction both to my understanding and my conscience; especially I found a word in season, respecting my foolish and wicked shame and attention to character, in enquiring after divine truth, and in the performance of the important duties of a christian minister. These solemn words in particular came home to my heart. 'If the spirit of the world, pride, carelessness re-'specting the soul, and neglect of Christ, be not 'hateful to God and destructive to men, the gospel '(with reverence I speak it) is an imposition. Do 'you abhor that thought as blasphemy? Abhor as 'much a fawning upon Christ from year to year in 'your closet, calling him there your Lord and God, 'and then coming out to consult the world, how far 'they will allow you to obey his plain commands, 'without saying you are a *Methodist*. Cease rather to 'profess any allegiance to Christ, than treat him, under 'professions of duty, with such contempt. "I would," saith he to the church of *Laodicea*, "thou wert cold "or hot; so then because thou art lukewarm, and "neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my "mouth." (Page 85.)

I should as easily be convinced that there was no Holy Ghost, as that he was not present with my soul

when I read this passage, and the whole of what Mr. *Venn* has written upon the subject. It came to my heart with such evidence, conviction, and demonstration, that it lifted me up above the world, and produced that victory which faith alone can give, and that liberty which uniformly attends the presence of the Spirit of the Lord. I became at once ashamed of my base ingratitude and foolish fears, and was filled with such consolation and rejoicing, even in the prospect of sacrificing my character, and running the risk of infamy and contempt, as made me entirely satisfied on that head; and, some few seasons of unbelief excepted, I have never since been much troubled about being called an *Enthusiast* or a *Methodist*.

But while I was thus delivered from the dread of unmerited reproaches, I continued as much as ever afraid of *real enthusiasm*; nay, I became continually more and more averse to every thing which can justly bear that name: so that the nearer I verged to what I had ignorantly supposed to be enthusiastical, the more apprehensive I was, lest my earnestness in such interesting enquiries, and the warmth of my natural spirit thus occasionally increased, should put me off my guard, and betray me into delusions and mistakes. From this danger I could however obtain no security, but by keeping close to the study of the word of God; and by being earnest and particular in praying to be preserved from error, and to be enabled to distinguish between the pure revelations of the Holy Spirit contained in Scripture, and the inventions of men, the imaginations of my own heart, or the delusions of the spirit of lies.

The Doctrine of a Trinity of coequal persons in the Unity of the Godhead had been hitherto no part of my creed. I had long been accustomed to despise this great mystery of godliness. I had first quarrelled with the articles of the established Church about this doctrine; I had been very decided and open in my declarations against it; and my unhumbled reason still retained many objections to it. But about *June*, 1777, I began to be troubled with doubts about my own sentiments, and to suspect the truth of Dr. *Clarke's* hypothesis. I had just read Mr. *Lindsey's Apology* and *Sequel*. Before I saw these tracts, I had even ridiculed those who thought of confuting him on the *orthodox scheme*, and was not without thoughts of maintaining Dr. *Clarke's* system against him. But when I understood that he claimed Dr. *Clarke* as a *Socinian*, I was extremely surprised, and in consequence, was led again to a most serious and anxious consideration of the subject. Yet the more I studied, the more I was dissatisfied. Many things now first occurred to me as strong objections against my own sentiments; and being thus perplexed, and unable to form a scheme for myself, I easily perceived that I was not qualified to dispute with another person. My pride and my convictions struggled hard for the victory: I was very unwilling to become a *Trinitarian in the strict sense of the word*, though in *my own sense* I had for some time pretended to be one; and yet the more I considered it the more I was dissatisfied with all other systems. My esteem for Mr. —— was also now very much increased; and though I had hitherto concealed this part of my sentiments from him, yet

I knew his to be very different. I was not indeed willing to be taught by him in other matters: yet in this respect, finding his opinion the same which in all former ages of the Church had been accounted orthodox, while that which I held had always been branded as heretical; my fears of a mistake were thus exceedingly increased. In this perplexity I applied to the Lord, and frequently besought him to lead me to a settled conclusion what was the truth in this important subject. After much meditation, together with a careful examination of all the Scriptures which I then understood to relate to it, accompanied with earnest prayer for divine teaching, I was at length constrained to renounce, as utterly indefensible, all my former sentiments, and to accede to that doctrine which I had so long despised. I saw, and I could no longer help seeing, that the offices and works attributed in Scripture to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, are such as none but the infinite God could perform: that it is a contradiction to believe the *real*, and consequently *infinite*, satisfaction to divine justice made by the death of Christ, without believing him to be 'very God of very God:' nor could the Holy Ghost give spiritual life, and dwell in the hearts of all believers at the same time, to adapt his work of convincing, enlightening, teaching, strengthening, sanctifying, and comforting, to the several cases of every individual, were he not the omniscient, omnipresent, infinite God. Being likewise certain, from reason as well as from Scripture, that there is not, and cannot be, more Gods than one; I was driven from my reasonings, and constrained to submit my understanding to divine

revelation; and, allowing that the incomprehensible God alone can fully know the unsearchable mysteries of his own divine nature, and the manner of his own existence, to adopt the doctrine of a 'Trinity in Unity,' among other reasons of still greater moment, in order to preserve consistency in my own scheme. It was however, a considerable time before I was disentangled from my embarrassments on this subject.

Hitherto my prejudices against Mr. *Hervey*, as a writer upon doctrinal subjects, had been very strong. I thought him a very pious man, and I had read with pleasure some parts of his *Meditations;* yet looking on him as an enthusiast, I had no curiosity to see any other of his writings. But about *July*, 1777, I providentially met with his *Theron and Aspasio;* and, opening the book, I was much pleased with the first passage on which I cast my eye. This engaged me to read the whole with uncommon attention: nor did I, in twice perusing it, meet with any thing contrary to my own sentiments, without immediately beseeching God to guide me to the truth. I trust the Lord heard and answered these prayers; for, though I could not but dissent from him (as I still do) in some few things: yet I was both instructed and convinced by his arguments and illustrations in every thing relative to our fallen, guilty, lost, and helplessly miserable state by nature; and the way and manner in which the believer is accounted, and accepted as, righteous, in the presence of a just, holy, and heart-searching, a faithful and unchangeable God: especially his animated description and application of the stag-chase cleared up

this important matter to my mind, more than any thing I had hitherto met with upon the subject.

I had now acceded to most of the doctrines which at present I believe and preach; except the doctrine of personal election, and those tenets which immediately depend on it and are connected with it. These were still foolishness to me; and so late as *August*, 1777, I told my friend Mr. —— that I was sure I never should be of his sentiments on that head. To this he answered, that if I never mentioned this subject, he never should, as we were now agreed in all he judged absolutely needful; but, that he had not the least doubt of my very shortly becoming a *Calvinist*, as I should presently discover my system of doctrine to be otherwise incomplete, and inconsistent with itself. Indeed I had by this time, so repeatedly discovered myself to be mistaken where I had been very confident, that I began to suspect myself in every thing, in which I entertained sentiments, different from those with whom I conversed. This, however, did not influence me to take their opinions upon trust: but it disposed me more particularly and attentively to consider them; and in every perplexity to have recourse to the Lord, to be preserved from error, and guided to the truth.

About the same time also, I began to have more frequent applications made to me by persons under deep concern for their souls. My heart was much interested in this new employment; as I was greatly concerned to see their pressing anxieties, and to hear their doubts, difficulties, and objections against them-

selves: and being sincerely desirous to give them good instruction, and to lead them on to establishment and comfort, I felt my deficiency, and seemed to have no ground to go on, nor any counsel to give them, but what, instead of relieving them, led them into greater perplexity. In this case, I earnestly besought the Lord to teach me what word in season to speak unto them.

While I was thus circumstanced, I read *Witsius's Economy of the Covenants*, and observed what use he made of the doctrine of election for this very purpose. This convinced me that the doctrine, *if true*, would afford that ground of encouragement which the people wanted. They had been awakened from ignorant formality, open ungodliness and vice, or entire carelessness about religion, to an earnest and anxious enquiry after salvation; they appeared truly penitent, and real believers, and heartily desirous of cleaving unto the Lord; and they wanted some security that they should not, through the deceitfulness of their hearts, their weakness, the entanglements of the world, and the temptations of Satan, fall back again into their former course of sin. This, if genuine, was the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit: and if wrought in consequence of the determinate purpose and foreknowledge of God respecting them; it would follow, from the entire and undeserved freeness of this first gift bestowed on them, when neither desiring nor seeking it, but while in a state of enmity and rebellion against God, and neglect of his service; and from his unchangeableness in his purpose and faithfulness to his promises,

that he would assuredly carry on and complete, the good work of his grace, and keep them by his power, as in a castle, through faith unto salvation.

Having now discovered one use of this doctrine, which before I objected to as useless and pernicious, I was led to consider how the other objections, which I had been accustomed to urge against it, might be answered. It is true, I now began to consider it as a mystery, not to be comprehended, nor yet too curiously to be searched into by man's natural reason; but humbly received by faith just as far as it is plainly revealed in God's unerring word. I was therefore constrained to leave many objections unanswered, or to resolve them into the incomprehensible nature of God, whose judgments and counsels are as the great deep, unfathomable; and into the sovereignty of God, who doeth what he will with his own, and gives no account of any of his matters, let who will presume to find fault; and into his declarations, that his thoughts and ways are as far above our thoughts and ways, as the heavens are above the earth. Here I left the matter, conscious, at length, that such knowledge was too high for me: and that, if God had said it, it was not my place to cavil against it.—I acknowledge this way of proceeding is not very satisfactory to man's proud curiosity, who would be as God, and know all that God knows! and who even dares to dispute with him! and there are times when I can hardly acquiesce in such a solution. But surely it is highly becoming the dependent state and limited understanding of the creature, to submit the decision of all such high points implicitly to the award of the

infinitely wise Creator. Indeed the christian religion expressly requires it of us; for our Lord declares, that "Except we receive the kingdom of God" (not as disputing philosophers, but) "as a little child, we "shall in no wise enter therein." The day is coming when we shall be able to answer all objections. Here "we walk by faith," "and see in part, through "a glass, darkly;" hereafter "we shall see face to "face, and know even as we are known."*

* The doctrine of *personal election to eternal life*, when properly stated, lies open to no objection, which may not likewise with equal plausibility be urged against the conduct of God, in placing one nation in a more favourable condition than another, especially as to religious advantages; without the previous good or bad behaviour of either of them, or any *discernable reason for the preference*. In both cases we may say, *unmerited favour* to one person, or people, is no *injustice to others*; and the infinitely wise God hath many reasons for his determinations, which we cannot discern, and which he deigns not to make known to us.

If sinners *deserve* the punishment inflicted on them, it cannot be *unjust* in the great Governor of the world to *pre-determine* their condemnation to it. The contrariety to justice and goodness, if there be any, must certainly be found in the Lord's *actual dealings with his creatures*, and not *in his predetermination thus to deal with them*. It could not be inconsistent with any of the divine attributes, for the Lord from all eternity to decree to act consistently with all of them. The clamours excited against *predestination*, if carefully scrutinized, are generally found to be against the *thing decreed*, and not against the circumstance of its *having been decreed from eternity*. The sovereignty of God, when duly considered, appears to be nothing more than infinite perfection determining and accom-

Leaving therefore all difficulties of a metaphysical nature to be cleared up in that world of light and knowledge, I began to consider the abuses of this

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plishing every thing in the very best manner possible; and infallibly performing the counsels of everlasting knowledge and wisdom, justice, truth, and love, notwithstanding all the plans and designs of innumerable voluntary rational agents, which might seem incompatible with them: nay, performing those counsels even by means of these voluntary agents, in perfect consistency with their free agency and accountableness; but in a manner which we are utterly incapable of comprehending!

We should scarcely object to this infinitely wise and holy sovereignty of God, however absolute; did we not, from consciousness of guilt and carnal enmity of heart, suspect that it might probably be found at variance with our happiness: and I apprehend, should any man be fully persuaded that God had decreed his eternal happiness; however groundless that persuasion might be, he would find his aversion to the doctrine of election exceedingly abated by it. I have often observed, that some persons, who declaim most vehemently against the Calvinistical doctrine of the divine decrees, seem perfectly reconciled to predestination, when persuaded that God hath *eternally decreed the salvation of all men!* On the other hand, no consciously impenitent sinner is cordially reconciled to the general declarations of Scripture, concerning the everlasting misery of all impenitent sinners, whatever he may think about personal election.

In fact the grand difficulty in the whole of the divine conduct equally embarrasses every system of Christianity; and every scheme of Deism, except men deny that God is the Creator and Governor of the world. For wickedness and misery actually exist and abound: the fact is undeniable: the almighty God could have prevented this; and we should have thought that

doctrine, which I had always looked upon as a very formidable objection against it. But I soon discovered, that though ungodly men, who make profession of religion, will turn the grace of God into licentiousness; yet we might so explain and guard these doctrines, that none could thus abuse them, without being conscious of it, and so detecting their own hypocrisy. It still indeed appeared probable to me, that the preaching of them might at first occasion some trouble of mind to a few well-disposed persons:

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infinite love would have preserved the creation from all evils of every description. Yet infinite Wisdom saw good to permit them to enter, and amazingly to prevail! Till this difficulty be completely solved, let none object to truths, plainly revealed in Scripture, on account of similar difficulties. But let us remember, that our narrow capacities and scanty information do not qualify us to judge, concerning what it becomes the infinite God to determine and to do: and let us adopt the language of the apostle on this subject; "O the depth of the riches both "of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are "his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath "known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsel-"lor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recom-"pensed unto him again? For *of him*, and *through him*, and *to* "*him* are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen!" (*Rom.* xi. 33—36.)

As for the objections made to these doctrines, as inconsistent with free agency, accountableness, commands, invitations, calls to repentance, faith and holiness, and diligence in the use of being means; they *universally* and *altogether* arise from *misrepresentation* and *misapprehension* of the subject. (See the Author's *Sermon on Election and Final Perseverance*, &c.) 5th Ed.

but I considered, that by a cautious declaration, and contrasting them with the general promises of the gospel to all who believe, this might in great measure be prevented; at the worst, a little personal conversation with such persons, would seldom, if ever, fail to satisfy them, and enable them in general to derive encouragement from them: while the unsettling of the minds of such persons, as are carelessly living in an unconverted state, is the great end of all our preaching to them; and therefore we need not fear any bad effect of this doctrine in that respect. The great question therefore was, Are these doctrines in the Bible or not? Hitherto I had wilfully passed over and neglected, or endeavoured to put some other construction upon, all those parts of Scripture which directly speak of them: but now I began to consider, meditate, and pray over, them; and I soon found that I could not support my former interpretations. They *would* teach predestination, election, and final perseverance, in spite of all my twisting and expounding. It also occurred to me, that these doctrines, though now in disgrace, were universally believed and maintained by our venerable reformers; that they were admitted, at the beginning of the reformation, into the creeds, catechisms, or articles of every one of the *Protestant* churches; that our articles and homilies expressly maintained them: and consequently, that a vast number of wise and sober-minded men, who in their days were burning and shining lights, had, upon mature deliberation, agreed, not only that they were true, but that they ought to be admitted as useful, or even as necessary articles of faith, by every one

who deemed himself called to take upon him the office of a christian minister.

In the course of this enquiry I perceived that my system was incomplete without them. I believed, that men, by nature born in sin, the children of wrath, and by wicked works the enemies of God, being in themselves ungodly and without strength; were saved of *free mercy and grace*, without having done any thing, more or less, to deserve it, through the Redeemer's righteousness and atonement, received by faith, the gift and operation of God; as born again, born of God, or new created unto good works and to the divine image, by the power of the Holy Ghost. It now, therefore, occurred to me to enquire, from *what source* these precious blessings, thus freely flowing through the channel of redemption, to poor worthless sinners, could originally spring? and thus my mind, was carried back from the consideration of the *effects*, to that of the *cause;* and from the promises made to fallen man, to the counsels and purposes of God which induced him to give those promises. I was engaged in frequent meditations on the divine omniscience, unchangeableness, and eternity; and the end which the all-sufficient God had in view in all his works, even the manifestation of the glory of his own perfections; and I perceived, that redemption, itself, as planned by God, to whom were "known all his "works from the beginning of the world," must be the result of his eternal purpose of displaying the glory of his mercy and grace, in harmonious consistency with his most awful justice and holiness; and thus manifesting the inexhaustible resources of his manifold

wisdom, in glorifying at once all these attributes, which, considered as *perfect*, seem to created understanding irreconcilable to each other. I considered, that, until the fall of man and his redemption had manifested the attribute of mercy to sinners, it had, as far as we can learn, been unexercised and undisplayed, and consequently unknown to any but God himself, from all eternity; nor could he have the glory of it, but must have been considered as so perfect in justice and holiness as to be incapable of mercy, had he not chosen some objects on whom to exercise it, and devised some method of displaying it in consistency with his other perfections. Thus I perceived redemption to be the effect of a settled design, formed in God's eternal counsels, of manifesting himself to his reasonable creatures, complete and full orbed in all conceivable perfections. But as all have transgressed the divine law, and as none are disposed of themselves to embrace his humbling and holy salvation, or even to enquire after it: so I was convinced that the merciful and gracious nature of God, the Fountain of goodness, alone moved him to choose any of them as objects of his favourable regard: that his unconstrained will and pleasure are the only assignable causes of his choosing one rather than another: and that in fact the whole work was his own; his wisdom having devised the means; his love and all-sufficiency having in the person, offices, and work of Christ made all things ready; his providence directing absolutely to whom the word of invitation shall be sent; and his Holy Spirit alone inclining and enabling the soul to embrace it by faith.—Hence I concluded that God, who knoweth the end

from the beginning, and is a sovereign, and, when none have deserved any thing, may do as he will with his own, actually "chose us" (even every individual believer,) "in Christ, before the foundation of the "world, that we *should* be holy, and without blame be- "fore him in love; having predestinated us unto the "adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, ac- "cording to the good pleasure of his will; to the praise "of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." (*Eph.* i. 4—6.)

In short, though my objections were many, my anxiety great, and my resistance long; yet, by the evidence, which, both from the word of God and from my own meditation, crouded upon my mind, I was at length constrained to submit; and, God knoweth, with fear and trembling, to allow these formerly despised doctrines a place in my creed. Accordingly, about *Christmas*, 1777, I began cautiously to establish the truth of them, and to make use of them for the consolation of poor distressed and fearful believers. This was the only use I then knew of them, though I now see their influence on every part of evangelical truth.

However, I would observe that, though I assuredly believe these doctrines as far as here expressed; (for I am not willing to trace them any higher, by reasonings or consequences, into the unrevealed things of God;) and though I exceedingly need them in my view of religion, both for my own consolation, and security against the consequences of a deceitful heart, an ensnaring world, and a subtle temper, as also for the due exercise of my pastoral office: yet I would not be understood to place the acknowledgement of them

upon a level with the belief of the doctrines before spoken of. I can readily conceive the character of a humble, pious, spiritual christian, who is either an utter stranger to the doctrines in question, or who, through misapprehension or fear of consequences, cannot receive them. But I own I find a difficulty in conceiving of a humble, pious, spiritual Christian, who is a stranger to his own utterly lost condition, to the deceitfulness and depravity of his heart, to the *natural* alienation of his affections from God, and to the defilements of his best duties; who trusts, either in whole or in part, *allowedly* to any thing for pardon and justification, except the blood and righteousness of a crucified Saviour, God manifested in the flesh; or who expects to be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, in any other way than by being born again, created anew, converted, and sanctified by the divine power of the Holy Ghost.

Some time in *November*, 1777, I was, by a then unknown friend, furnished with a considerable number of books, written in general by the old divines, both of the Church of *England*, and of the *Dissenters*. And, to my no small surprise, I found that those doctrines, which are now deemed novel inventions, and are called *Methodistical*, are in these books every where discoursed of as known and allowed truths: and that that system which, despising to be taught by men, and unacquainted with such authors, I had for near three years together been *hammering* out for myself with no small labour and anxiety, was to be found ready made to my hands in every book I opened.

I do not wonder that the members of the Church of

England are generally prejudiced against the writings of *Dissenters*; for I have been so myself to an excessive degree. We imbibe this prejudice with the first rudiments of instruction, and are taught by our whole education, to consider it as meritorious: though no doubt it is a prejudice, of which every sincere enquirer after truth ought to be afraid, and every pretended enquirer ashamed; for how can we determine on which side truth lies, if we will not examine both sides? Indeed it is well known to all those who are acquainted with the church-histories of those times, that till the reign of *James* I. there were no controversies between the established Church and the *Puritans*, concerning doctrine; both parties being in all matters of importance of the same sentiments: they only contended about discipline and ceremonies; till the introduction of *Arminianism* gave occasion to the *Calvinists* being denominated *Doctrinal Puritans*. To this period all our church-writers were *Calvinistical* in doctrine: and even after that time many might be mentioned, who were allowed friends to the Church of *England*, that opposed those innovations, and agreed in doctrine with every thing above stated. Let it suffice, out of many, to recommend the works of Bishop *Hall*, especially his *Contemplations on the Life of Jesus*, a book not easily to be prized too highly; and Dr. *Reynold's* works. To these no true friend to the Church of *England* can reasonably object: and in general, I believe and teach nothing but what they plainly taught before me.

The *outlines* of my scheme of doctrine were now completed: but I had been so taken up with doctrinal

enquiries, that I was still in great measure a stranger to my own heart, and had little experience of the power of the truths I had embraced. The pride of reasoning and the conceit of superior discernment, had all along accompanied me; and, though somewhat broken, had yet considerable influence. Hitherto therefore I had not thought of hearing any person preach; because I did not think any one, in the circle of my acquaintance, capable of giving me such information, as I wanted. But being at length convinced that Mr. —— had been right, and that I had been mistaken, in the several particulars in which we had differed; it occurred to me, that having preached these doctrines so long, he must understand many things concerning them to which I was a stranger. Now therefore, though not without much remaining prejudice, and not less in the character of a judge than of a scholar, I condescended to be his hearer, and occasionally to attend his preaching, and that of some other ministers:—and I soon perceived the benefit; for from time to time the secrets of my heart were discovered to me, far beyond what I had hitherto noticed; and I seldom returned from hearing a sermon, without having conceived a meaner opinion of myself; without having attained to a further acquaintance with my deficiencies, weaknesses, corruptions, and wants; or without being supplied with fresh matter for prayer, and directed to greater watchfulness. I likewise learned the use of experience in preaching; and was convinced, that the readiest way to reach the hearts and consciences of others, was to speak from my own. In short, I gradually saw more and more my need of instruction, and was at length

brought to consider myself as a very novice in religious matters. Thus I began experimentally to perceive our Lord's meaning, when he says, "Except "ye receive the kingdom of God as a little child, ye "shall in no wise enter therein." For, though my proud heart is continually rebelling, and would fain build up again the former *Babel* of self-conceit; yet I trust I have from this time, in my settled judgment, aimed, and prayed to be enabled, to consider myself as a little child, who ought simply to sit at the Master's feet, to hear his words with profound submission, and wait his teaching with earnest desire and patient attention. From this time I have been enabled to consider those persons, in whom knowledge has been ripened by years, experience and observation, as fathers and instructors; to take pleasure in their company, to value their counsels, and with pleasure to attend their ministry.

Thus I trust the old building, I had purposed to repair, was pulled down to the ground, and the foundation of the new building of God laid aright; "Old "things passed away, behold all things were become "new."—"What things were gain to me, those I "have counted loss for Christ." My boasted reason I have discovered to be a blind guide, until humbled, enlightened, and sanctified, by the Spirit of God; my former wisdom foolishness; and that when I thought I knew much, I knew nothing as I ought to know. Since this period, every thing I have experienced, heard, or read; and every thing I observe around me, confirms and establishes me in the assured belief of those truths which I have received; nor do I in gene-

ral any more doubt whether they be from God, than I doubt whether the sun shines when I see its light, and am warmed with its refreshing beams. I see the powerful effects of them continually among those to whom I preach; I experience the power of them daily in my own soul; and, while by meditating on, and "glorying in, the cross of Christ, I find the world "crucified unto me, and I unto the world;"—by preaching Jesus Christ and him crucified, I see notoriously immoral persons, "taught by the saving grace "of God to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and "to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this "present world;" being examples to such as before they were a scandal to.

And now by this change, the consequences of which I so much dreaded, what have I lost even in respect of this present world?—Indeed I have lost some degree of favour, and I escape not pity, censure, scorn, and opposition: but the Lord is introducing me to a new and far more desirable acquaintance; even to that of those whom the Holy Ghost hath denominated *the excellent of the earth;* nay, the Lord the Spirit condescends to be my Comforter. In general I enjoy an established peace of conscience, through the blood of sprinkling, and continual application to the heavenly Advocate; with a sweet content, and, "that peace of God which passeth all understanding," in "casting all my cares upon him who careth for "me:" and I am not left utterly without experience of that "joy which is unspeakable and full of glory." These the world could not give me, were I in favour with it; of these it cannot deprive me by its frowns.

My desire henceforth, God knoweth, is to live to his glory, and by my whole conduct and conversation "to adorn the doctrine of God my Saviour," and "to shew forth his praises who hath called me out of "darkness into his marvellous light;" to be in some way or other useful to his believing people; and to invite poor sinners, who "are walking in a vain sha- "dow, and disquieting themselves in vain," to "taste "and see how gracious the Lord is, and how blessed "they are who put their trust in him—"

'Now would I tell to sinners round,
What a dear Saviour I have found;
Would point to his redeeming blood,
And cry, Behold the Way to God!'

Thus hath the Lord led me, a poor blind sinner, in a way that I knew not;—he hath made darkness light before me, crooked things straight, and hard things easy, and hath brought me to a place of which I little thought when I set out: and having done these things for me, I believe, yea, I am undoubtedly sure, he will never leave me nor forsake me. To him be the glory of his undeserved and long-resisted grace: to me be the shame, not only of all my other sins, but also of my proud and perverse opposition to his purposes of love towards me. But all this was permitted that my high spirit and stout heart being at length humbled and subdued, "I might remember, and be "confounded, and never open my mouth any more, "because of my shame, now that the Lord is pacified "to me for all that I have done."

And now as in the presence of the heart-searching Judge, I have given, without one wilful misrepresentation, addition, or material omission, a history of the great things God hath done for my soul; or, if that suit not the reader's view of it, a history of that change which hath recently taken place in my religious sentiments and conduct, to the surprise of some, and perhaps the displeasure of others, among my former friends. The doctrines I have embraced are indeed charged with being destructive of moral practice, and tending to licentiousness: but though I know that my best "righteousness are as filthy rags;" yet I trust I may return thanks to God, that by his grace he hath so upheld me, since this change took place, that I have not been permitted to disgrace the cause in which I have embarked by any immoral conduct: "My rejoicing," in this respect, "is this, that in simplicity "and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but "by the grace of God I have my conversation in the "world." I can confidently avow, that the belief of these doctrines hath a quite contrary effect upon me. I most earnestly desire, aim, endeavour, and pray to be enabled, to love God and keep his commandments "without partiality, and without hypocrisy;" and so to demean myself as "by well doing to put to silence the "ignorance of foolish men." That I fall so very far short in every thing, is not the effect of my new doctrines, but of my old depraved nature and deceitful heart.—"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and "renew a right spirit within me!"

PART III.

Observations on the preceding narrative.

MY design in writing this account of myself, and my religious enquiries and change of sentiments, was this: I considered myself as a singular instance of a very unlikely person, in an uncommon manner, being led on from one thing to another, to embrace a system of doctrine which he once heartily despised. As I assuredly believe that this change hath been effected under the guidance and teaching of the holy Spirit: so I hoped that a circumstantial relation of it might be an encouragement and comfort to those who know and love the Lord, and from them levy a tribute of gratitude and praise to our gracious God: and that it also might be instrumental, by the convincing Spirit, to awaken others to a serious review of their religious sentiments; to put them upon the same earnest enquiry after the truth as it is in Jesus; and to influence them to the diligent use of the same blessed means, in which the Lord directed me to be found. I would therefore now offer a few observations on the preceding narrative: and may the Lord guide both the writer and every reader of these pages to the saving knowledge of the truth, and into the ways of peace and righteousness!

I. It must be evident to every *unprejudiced* reader of this narrative, that at the time this change commenced, I was, humanly speaking, a most unlikely

person to embrace the system of doctrine above stated. —This will appear from the following considerations.

1. My religious opinions had been for many years directly contrary to it. Being always of a reflecting turn of mind, I entertained exceedingly high notions of the powers of human reason; and I had, upon *reasoning principles*, embraced a system of religion, which both soothed my conscience, and flattered my self-conceit. After some trivial alterations, I seemed to myself, upon mature deliberation to have come to a settled determination; and had bestowed considerable pains in making myself acquainted with those arguments and interpretations of Scripture, by which that system is usually defended: and I had raked together many of those plausible objections and high charges, which are commonly brought by reasoning men against the doctrines and characters of the *Calvinists*. But I was in great measure a stranger to what the *Calvinists* could say for themselves; because I thought the matter too plain to bear an argument, and therefore did not count their answers worth reading. In short very few have been recovered from that abyss of error, (for so I must call it) into which I had been permitted to sink. Full of confidence in my cause, and in the arguments with which I was prepared to support it, I was eager to engage in controversy with the *Calvinists*, and entertained the most sanguine hopes of victory. In this confidence I frequently harangued against them from the pulpit, and spared not to charge upon them consequences both absurd and shocking. Yet after much, very much, anxious diligent enquiry, I have embraced, as the sacred truths

of God's unerring word, every doctrine of this despised system!

2. My natural spirit and temper were very unfavourable to such a change. Few persons have ever been more self-sufficient, and positive in their opinions, than I was. Fond to excess of entering into argument.. I never failed on these occasions to betray this peculiarity of my character. I seldom acknowledged or suspected myself mistaken; and scarcely ever dropped an argument, till either my reasonings or obstinacy had silenced my opponent. A certain person once said of me, that I was like a stone rolling down a hill, which could neither be stopped nor turned: this witness was true; but those things, which are impossible with man, are easy with God. I am evidently both stopped and turned: man I am persuaded could not have done it; but this hath God wrought, and I am not more a wonder to others than to myself. Indeed I carried the same obstinate positive temper into my religious enquiries; for I never gave up one tittle of my sentiments till I could defend it no longer; nor ever submitted to conviction till I could no longer resist. The strong man, armed with my natural pride and obstinacy, with my vain imaginations, and reasonings, and high thoughts, had built himself many strong-holds, and kept his castle in my heart; and, when One stronger than he came against him, he stood a long siege: till, being by superior force driven from one to another, and all his armour in which he trusted being at length taken from him, he was constrained to recede. So that the Lord having made me willing in the day of his power, I was

forced to confess: "O, Lord, thou art stronger than "I, and hast prevailed."

3. My situation in life rendered such a change improbable. I had an increasing family, no private fortune, a narrow precarious income, and no expectations, except from such friends as my conduct might procure or continue to me. I had unexpectedly contracted an acquaintance with some of those, whose favour goes a great way towards a man's advancement in life; nor was I insensible to the advantages to be hoped for, from cultivating by a compliant behaviour their kind and friendly regard to me. At the same time I was no stranger to the opinion, which the world entertains of those who preach the disreputable doctrines above mentioned; and could not but conclude, that embracing them would probably deprive me of these prospects of preferment. But, as the result of diligent enquiry, I was assuredly convinced that it was my indispensable duty to profess and preach them, and that by so doing alone, I could ensure to myself the favour of a better Friend than any here below: and thus, while fully aware all along how unfavourable, *according to human probability*, it would prove to my worldly interests, I at length deliberately embraced them.

4. My regard to character was no trifling security against such a change of sentiment. I was ambitiously and excessively fond of that honour which cometh from man; and considered the desire of praise as allowable, nay, laudable. By this motive was I urged on to a very diligent prosecution of my studies, even beyond what natural inclination led me to; and

my whole conduct was influenced by, my whole conversation was tinctured with, this vain-glorious aim. On the other hand, with approbation and self-complacency, I had been accustomed to hear the most contemptuous and approbrious epithets liberally bestowed on those persons to whom I now joined myself: and all along, as I verged nearer and nearer to *Methodism*, I was painfully sensible that I was drawing upon myself the same mortifying distinctions.—I have been a vain-glorious candidate for human applause; but I renounce such pretentions, and willingly submit to be considered by the world, under the mortifying character of a half-witted, cracked-brained enthusiast. These epithets I am sensibly are now bestowed upon me behind my back, nay, very often to my face: I bless God however, this doth not move me; but I can heartily thank him, that I am counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake. When however I saw the trial approaching, it appeared very formidable; and I can truly affirm, that nothing but the fullest conviction that the cause in which I was embarking was the cause of God; nothing, but not daring to act contrary to the plain dictates of my conscience, could have influenced me to make this sacrifice of my character, and bring upon myself so much scorn and contempt.

5. To reason with our despisers upon their own principles: If I am now fallen into enthusiasm, mistake, and strong delusion; I certainly was, when I first set out in this enquiry, a very unlikely person so to do. My leading resolve was to search for the truth diligently, and to embrace it wherever I found it, and whatever it might cost. No sooner had I begun the enquiry,

than I was called upon to give proof of the sincerity of this resolution; and, from a principle of conscience, though a mistaken one, I renounced my prospect of an immediate preferment. Since that time I have also deliberately sacrificed my character, and hazarded the loss of all my former friends. Giving these proofs of integrity, I set of in dependence on those plain promises which I have mentioned I have sought this desired knowledge of the truth chiefly in reading the holy Scriptures, and by prayer for the promised teaching of the Holy Ghost, in the manner which has been related; and I am now led to conclusions diametrically opposite to what I expected!—Now lay all these things together, and attentively consider them; and then let your own consciences determine how far it is probable, that a person, in this manner seeking for the truth, should be given over to a strong delusion to believe a pernicious lie.—"If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? "Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a ser- "pent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he give him a "scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give "good gifts unto your children; how much more "shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to "them that ask him?" Can any man suppose, that af- "ter such repeated and continued pleadings of the ex- press promises of the Lord to this effect, in earnest prayer, according to his appointment, I should be delivered up to the teaching of the father of lies? Can any one make this conclusion without an evident insinuation that God hath broken his promise? In short, you may make a jest of the narrative; you may

throw by the book without giving any attention to an argument of this kind; you may say, what you never can prove, that it is all a contrived story; or you may argue, that these promises, though contained in the Bible, are not to be depended on *by us*, which is to give up the Scriptures to be scoffed at by *Infidels* and *Atheists*, and to render them useless to the humble anxious enquirer after truth and salvation: but by no other means, I am assured, can you account for this single circumstance, without allowing, that the substance of those doctrines which I have now embraced, is indeed contained in the word of God; that they comprise the truth as it is in Jesus, and are not corrupted with any such delusion as can hazard the salvation of my soul, or the souls of those who by my ministry receive them.—On this supposition all difficulties vanish. The Lord had given me a sincere desire to know the saving doctrine of the gospel; and, though I was exceedingly ignorant, obstinate, and prejudiced; yet this desire having, according to his directions, led me to the word of God, and influenced me to seek his teaching by prayer, he was faithful to his own promises, and it was an example of his own words, "Every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth." My evident sincerity in seeking the truth was sufficient to convince any person, conversant and experienced in the things of God, that, as my friend foretold, thither would all my enquiries lead me, in that would they all finally centre. And could I be assured, beloved reader, whoever thou art, that thou wast as sincerely desirous to know the truth as I then was, and as heartily resolved to embrace it wherever

thou mightest find it, and whatever it should cost thee; had I also assurance, that in a believing dependence on these promises, thou wast diligently, and from day to day, in the study of the word of God and prayer, seeking the accomplishment of them: I would as confidently foretel, that, as to those things which I now regard as essential to salvation, and, if thou hast the souls of others committed to thee, as to what is needful for thy usefulness in the ministry, thou wouldst be brought in time to these same conclusions, whatever thy present religious sentiments may be. May the Lord give thee true sincerity, and incline thine heart to try the experiment!

I am aware that many will object to what I have argued on this head, as being too confident; and as what is urged by men of contrary religious sentiments, each in behalf of his own system: and, as I would not leave any material and plausible objection in force against what I have advanced, I hope the reader will excuse my obviating this beforehand. I would therefore intreat those, who object to the confidence with which this argument is brought forward, *impartially and carefully to consider the limitations with which on every hand it is guarded:* and then to enquire whether in any other way, than that which has been mentioned, they can account for the fact. That is, supposing this narrative true, (for which the appeal is to the heart-searching God;) and supposing the promises mentioned to be proposed to us, that we might embrace them, depend on them, and plead them in prayer, considering the glory of the divine veracity as concerned in their accomplishment to every believer;

let them try whether they can possibly evade one of these conclusions:—either God had failed of his promise;—or he hath in the main, and as far as is expressed, led the author by his Holy Spirit to the knowledge and belief of the truth.—As to the confidence of men of opposite sentiments, I observe, that many who speak in high terms concerning sincerity and candour, will without hesitation condemn, as enthusiastical, such a reliance on the promises, and this way of searching for truth: and they cannot be supposed to seek truth in that manner which they condemn in others. Many perhaps slightly mention these matters, but will not endure to be closely questioned: for, being conscious that they have not sought the truth in this manner, they evade such discourse as personal. Again, the writings of many professed enquirers after truth, evidently shew that they expect to find it, not by "trusting the Lord with all their "heart," or seeking it from the Scriptures and by earnest prayer for the teaching of the Holy Spirit; but by "leaning to their own understanding," resting the argument on philosophical reasonings, and the authority of this or that renowned name; and supporting their conclusions by bold and perplexing criticisms and interpretations of Scripture. Hence so many daring appeals from revelation to reason and philosophy! Hence such and so many objections brought against doctrines plainly revealed in God's word, if language have any determinate meaning! And so many consequences charged upon these doctrines, with a design to invalidate their divine authority; as if being made, by every disingenuous art, to

have the show of unreasonableness, were sufficient to prove the plainest revelation of the Holy Spirit a falshood! Hence such liberty in interpretation and criticism on the word of God, as the learned would never endure in interpreting or criticising *Virgil* or *Horace!* These things prove that such persons are strangers to that earnest, hearty, sincere desire to *know the truth*, which brings the enquirer to a humble willingness to be taught of God, and in submission of understanding to seek wisdom from his word and Spirit. It is indeed most evident, that many, who profess to be influenced by *this sincere desire to know the truth*, are not troubled with suspicions that they are, or can be, wrong. They have made up their minds before they begin the enquiry, and you will not find them willing to make the least concession; but, in the management of the controversy, resolved to vindicate and contend for every tittle; and, where arguments fail, to make use of the other arts of controversy, with which skill in the management of their weapons, and anger against their opponents, can supply them! Where a cause is thus maintained, we may easily know that there is none of that earnest desire of learning the truth, that anxious fear of mistaking it, that self-diffidence, and those doubts concerning the sentiments held at present, which constitute the godly sincerity that leads the enquirer to the word and Spirit of God for direction and teaching. These things taken together, will on scriptural grounds cut off many confident pretenders to sincerity from their claims, as entirely, as they exclude *Annas* and *Caiaphas*, and the chief priests, Scribes, and Pharisees, from being sincere en-

quirers into the truth of the Old Testament; when, in support of their authority and reputation, and influenced by pride and anger, they, under colour of their law, put to death Him "of whom *Moses* and the "prophets did write, even *Jesus* of *Nazareth*, the "Son of God."—And as to men of another spirit, who appear sincere, humble, and willing to be taught of God in their enquiry after truth, but do not entirely agree with what has been laid down; I would only wish them to observe the distinction established between some and others of these doctrines. Such persons do not, I dare say, materially dissent from those which have been mentioned as *necessary to salvation:* as, therefore, I allow them to have been in the main taught of God, so I only require the same allowance for myself. Let it be supposed that the same God, who according to his promise hath led both, as far as is needful to salvation, in the same way, has in other things left us to differ, for the mutual exercise of candour and forbearance, till that time when we shall know even as we are known.

II. I would observe, that this change in my sentiments took place very gradually.

When any person suddenly changes his religious opinions for others very different from them, it is no inconsiderable evidence of a changeable and fickle disposition. It gives cause to suspect that he was not well established in his former sentiments; and that he had taken them upon trust, and was a stranger to the arguments by which they might be defended, and to the objections which might be urged against them. If worldly interest, reputation, or conveniency seem

to favour the change, there is room for a presumption that these had an undue influence upon him: if not, it may be insinuated that he was deluded with specious appearances; that he did not allow himself time to weigh the arguments on each side; and that he had only changed one set of notions for another, without having duly considered either of them. Such objections may reasonably be made, and the consequences of precipitate changes too often justify them. But though I was always, and still am, of a headlong impetuous spirit in other things; and when once I have purposed, can have no rest from incessant agitation of mind, till I have accomplished my design: yet in this particular I acted in direct opposition to my natural temper. Indeed at first I did in some instances too much betray my impetuosity: but at that time I acted not in the character of an enquirer, but in the full confidence that I was pleading the cause of truth, and had no more thought of becoming what the world calls a *Methodist*, than of turning *Mahometan*. But after that first hurry was over, though commonly in earnest, and sometimes in considerable perturbation of mind, I was outwardly calm and satisfied; being generally enabled to believe that, if I were in any thing at present mistaken, I should some time be guided to the truth.—My determination to set about this enquiry proceeded not so much from anxious fears about my own soul, as from a deep sense, impressed upon my heart, of the importance of my ministry, the worth of the souls committed to my charge, and the awful account to be given of them; and as I all along bestowed some pains in instructing my people in what I

believed to be the truth, I was preserved from any discomposing fears, or undue disquietude of mind. I sat down very coolly to search for the truth, I proceeded very gradually, and with *extreme caution;* I took no one opinion upon trust; I gave up none of my sentiments, until the arguments by which I had learned to defend them were satisfactorily answered; nor did I admit any new articles into my creed, till either every objection was obviated, or I was pressed with such as were still more unanswerable. Much, very much, prayer and meditation preceded every change of sentiment; and I was nearly three years, from the beginning of my enquiry, before I came to a determination what was truth. So long, deliberately, and step by step, I examined the premises, before I finally proceeded to draw my conclusion. I perceive much cause to be ashamed of my unteachable temper: for with such opportunities as were afforded me, if I had improved them, I might have attained to the knowledge and belief of the same truths in a much shorter time. But the Lord, I trust, led me in this way, and left me thus far to my own natural pride of heart; that it might more evidently appear, I received not my doctrines from man, but that indeed, in the first instance, I learned them from the word and Spirit of God.

III. I would observe, that I changed my religious views, without any teaching from the persons to whose sentiments I have now acceded. For a considerable time after the commencement of my enquiries, I would not so much as read what they had to urge in their own behalf. I entered indeed into a correspon-

dence with Mr. ——: my intention, however, was not to learn from him, but to dispute with him; and when he waved controversy, I dropped the correspondence, and utterly neglected his letters. From that time I avoided his company, and all the while I declined hearing him preach. I would not be understood to insinuate, that Mr. —— has not been useful to me: he has been, and continues to be, eminently so; and I continually see great cause to bless God for giving me such a friend, to be so near at hand on all occasions. But this I assuredly believe, that had I never seen him, at least from the time that his example had put me upon considering my conduct, I should have arrived at the same views of evangelical truth which I now have. His usefulness to me, has all along been in those matters in which we were in some measure agreed, not in those wherein we differed; for as to these my proud heart scorned to have him for a teacher.

At the same time, though I had the offer of several books written by *Dissenters* and *Methodists*, I declined it; and did not, for nearly two years, peruse any of them with sufficient attention to recollect any thing of consequence which they contained. I say not this, as slighting these books; for, justice requires me to acknowledge, that many, which then I ignorantly despised, contain as solid, judicious, and excellent divinity, as hath been written since the days of the apostles. But I did not get *my system* from them; for that was nearly completed before I was prevailed upon to read them. My studies, besides the Bible, were chiefly confined to authors of allowed reputation in

the Church of *England*, several of which I have mentioned. When they differed from each other, (as certainly *Tillotson* and *Hooker*, *Jortin* and *Beveridge*, *Bull* and *Hall* do differ very much indeed,) I endeavoured to judge for myself, comparing all of them with the word of God, and with the articles, homilies, and liturgy of the Church of *England:* and from such authors thus compared, as far as the writings of uninspired men have been instrumental to this change, I have received the greatest part of my present opinions.

But let it be observed, that the further these streams are traced upwards towards the fountain of the reformation, the purer they flow, according to my present judgment: and it may easily and undeniably be proved, that there is nothing material preached by many regular clergymen of the establishment, under the scandal of *Methodistical*, which was not expressly taught by those excellent persons, who, having laid the foundation of our church, gave their bodies to be burned in confirmation of their doctrine. It is greatly to be wished that their lives and discourses, living and dying, and their remaining writings, were more generally known among us; and did not remain locked up from the world, in large folios, in the learned languages, and in books out of print, or exceedingly scarce. In consequence of this the members of our national church are in general utterly ignorant of its standard-doctrines, and ignorantly brand those as *Methodists* and *Enthusiasts*, who preach zealously the very doctrines, of the first Reformers.

IV. I would observe the great influence which

the study of the Scriptures had in producing this change.

We are all too apt, without careful examination, to take things for granted, especially in respect of religion. We often collect our scheme of divinity from other authors, or from our own reasonings and imaginations; and only seek for a few detached texts which appear to countenance our pre-conceived opinions; neglecting, or very slightly considering, such parts of the word of God as seem incapable of being made use of to our purpose. We are likewise too prone, in availing ourselves of the labours of criticks and expositors, to resign up ourselves implicitly to their guidance, and to imagine that we have proof enough of our doctrines, if we can produce the sanction of some great name that has espoused and maintained them, without carefully examining whether they be right or wrong: but this is to pay that deference to the human interpretation, which is only due to the divine book commented on. We ministers especially, though at ordination we solemnly promise to turn all our studies, as much as may be, into this channel, are very apt to suffer our time and thoughts to be engrossed with such studies and employments, as are foreign to our profession, and interfere with it, and which leave at most but a secondary attention for the study of the word of God. And who can deny, that many do not bestow so much pains in meditating upon the Bible, and in comparing spiritual things with spiritual; or one part of Scripture with another, and every part with what they experience in their own hearts, and what they hear and see in the world around them,

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as they do about matters of far less consequence: So that probably should they at any time sit down to a diligent examination of the whole word of God, they would find it a very different book than they expected. Thus at least it has been with me, and possibly it may be so with many others.

The word of God informs us that true wisdom, the saving, practical, and experimental knowledge of divine things, is not to be acquired without earnest and diligent seeking: "My son, if thou wilt receive my "words, and hide my commandments with thee; so "that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply "thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest af-"ter knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for under-"standing: if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest "for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou under-"stand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge "of God." (*Prov.* ii. 1—6.) If then our wisdom has been acquired without any of that eagerness and painful diligence, with which the covetous man desires and seeks for his riches; it is a shrewd conjecture, that it is not of the genuine sort. Once I had in my own esteem a sort of wisdom, which seemed to offer itself to me spontaneously, and to be found with little seeking. But now I am persuaded it was a mere counterfeit, a fair-seeming pernicious foolishness.

That, which I now esteem to be true wisdom, if I could but attain unto it, is not to be acquired in so easy a manner. When I first began to desire and seek this wisdom, I set out with the assurance, that it was to be found in the Holy Scriptures, and no where else; they alone being able to make us wise unto sal-

vation. I therefore considered myself engaged to make them my study: and as the whole was given by inspiration from God, and was all declared to be profitable, according to the various ends which the Holy Spirit designed in it; I made the whole my study. Thus I learned to look upon the Bible as my book of instructions, given me along with the ministerial office by my Lord and Master; that from thence I might deduce all my doctrines, counsels and admonitions, warnings, examples, encouragements, rules of duty, and motives to duty: and I also considered it to be the believer's charter of privileges, containing exceedingly great and precious promises, and the whole of that which God saw fit to reveal concerning those unspeakable and inconceivable good things, which he hath of his infinite mercy prepared for them that love him. In order therefore faithfully to declare my message from the Lord Almighty to the souls of men, I found it indispensably needful to be well acquainted with every part, and to take the word of God myself, as well as propose it to others, as "the lantern of my feet, and the light of my paths:" not only attending to the *letter*, but also to the *true meaning*, the mind of the Spirit of God in it. This I found to be a work that required much time, great diligence, mature consideration, and an unbiassed unprejudiced mind.

With this view of the matter in part obtained, and continually more and more unfolding itself, I studied the word of God; and have now for nearly four years thus employed a very considerable part of my time, neither rejecting, nor yet greatly depending on, the assistance of interpreters. I sincerely desired to

know the truth, and for that end I read the Scriptures, "not as the word of man, but as the word of God." And though there have been seasons of remissness, when other employments and studies too much interfered with this main business; and though at first I was very far from an unbiassed mind, being blindly and obstinately prejudiced against those doctrines, which I now believe to be the true gospel of Jesus Christ: yet in that space I have read the Bible many times over, in every part, with the strictest attention of which I was capable. There are very few passages, which relate to doctrine, that I have not repeatedly and diligently examined, comparing one with another, with all the care and consideration I could; and I seldom ever ceased meditating on any portion of Scripture, until I had attained to some satisfying conclusion concerning its true meaning, and its agreement with other Scriptures. I may truly say I have filled *reams of paper* with religious discussions, with sermons, expositions, and letters; in all which I ransacked the Bible, to bring as much scriptural evidence for my direction as possible. For these last two years I have scarcely opened a book except upon religious subjects, and from morning till night, nearly every day, during this period, my thoughts incessantly have been employed in meditation upon the great truths of the gospel. Every difficulty and objection, (and difficulties and objections both from my own meditations, and in the course of my reading, continually crowded upon my mind,) sent me to the word of God, and increased my care and attention in examining and weighing every

text of Scripture, respecting the point in question, before I exchanged my old opinion for a new one.

Thus I may truly say, I have sought in the word of God, (that field in which alone this precious treasure lies hid) "for wisdom," *for the saving knowledge of divine things*, "as for silver, and searched for her as for hid treasures." And though I am sensible that my knowledge is still comparatively superficial, the knowledge of a child, of a novice in the school of Christ; yet I trust that, as far as relates to the leading truths of the gospel, according to the promise, I am "brought to understand the fear of the Lord, and "have found the knowledge of God."

Permit me now, beloved reader, to put thee in remembrance, that until thou hast, with some good measure of this diligence, studied the whole word of God, thou runnest very great hazards in passing judgment upon men and doctrines. Be cautious what thou doest; let these men quite alone, until thou hast imitated the conduct of the noble *Bereans*, and thoroughly, and with unbiassed mind, examined and meditated upon the whole word of God, to see whether the things they believe and teach be so or not: lest otherwise it should come to pass, (as probably it will) that in opposing and condemning them, thou shouldst be found to fight against God.—Oh, that the Lord would hear and grant my request, and by his Holy Spirit powerfully incline the hearts of all who read these sheets, according to their leisure, station in life, obligations, and opportunities, thus attentively to read their Bibles; not as the word of men, but as the word of God himself, speaking from heaven unto them.

and concerning the everlasting interests of their precious and immortal souls. Be the adviser what he may, despised and deserving to be despised, the advice is undoubtedly good: advise he shall have no occasion to repent having thus given, at the solemn hour of death, and the awful day of judgment; advice, which, at those approaching seasons, none will repent having followed; though it should divert them from more amusing, and at this day, more reputable studies, or engross that time which they have been accustomed to devote to more pleasurable and fashionable employments; but which, neglected, will be an additional sting in the conscience through all the countless ages of eternity.

And oh; that they, to whom the chief Shepherd hath committed the care of precious souls, and at whose hands he will assuredly require every one that perishes through their default; would take in good part this expression of the very affectionate desire of my soul, both in behalf of them and of their flocks, in dropping these hints concerning their peculiar obligations, to devote much of their time to the attentive unbiassed study of the word of God, that infinitely best, but often least studied, of all books! What avails it, that the ministers of the everlasting gospel should be learned classical scholars, profound philosophers, metaphysicians and mathematicians, expert logicians, or adorned with the knowledge of the politer sciences; if they are unacquainted, or but superficially acquainted, with the sacred Scriptures? These branches of literature may amuse and entertain them, may procure them preferment, reputation, respect, and favour;

but the knowledge of the Bible alone can enable them in such a manner to "take heed to themselves and to their doctrine," as shall issue in the everlasting salvation of their own souls and the souls committed to their care.—Far be it from me to presume to lay down my opinions as the standard of doctrine, or a rule for the faith and preaching of my brethren in the sacred ministry! But the more obscure I am, the less objection can there reasonably be against my hinting to them, that if any one should find this subject manifest itself to his conscience, and make him sensible that verily he hath been faulty in attending to other employments, and studying other books more than the word of God; then possibly he may be mistaken in his sentiments concerning the doctrine of the gospel, and being mistaken himself, may be misleading others, to the endangering of their immortal souls: for he cannot be certain but that, should he employ some years in this single study, (which its importance well deserves,) he may find the Bible a very different book than he expected.

V. I would observe the influence which *prayer* appears to have had in effecting this change.

I am aware that the world, though called *Christian*, is come to such a pass, that the very mention of this subject in many companies is accounted ill manners, or even received with ridicule; and that being known to maintain constant communion with God, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, is alone sufficient to denominate any person a *Methodist*. It is however, most certain, that the word of God is full of precepts, instructions, exhortations, invitations, promises, and

examples to this effect. He never read his Bible who knows not this; nor can any man, under any pretence whatever, make a jest of this great duty and privilege of a believer, without pouring contempt upon the Holy Scriptures, and insulting the brightest characters, there proposed to us as examples, not excepting the Lord Jesus himself. Let men therefore, under the profession of *Christianity*, be as irreligious and profane as they please, I shall not be ashamed to speak upon so unfashionable a topick: for if the word of God be true, he never knew any thing as he ought to know, never believed, never repented, never performed one duty aright in his life, who hath not sought all his wisdom, knowledge, faith, repentance, and sufficiency for obedience, from God, by fervent, instant, persevering prayer. Time was even, since I had souls committed to my care, that I lived in the neglect of this duty, and so, without God in the world; but since, through his forbearance and mercy, I have been in earnest about the salvation of my own soul, and the souls of other men—my conduct in this respect has been very different.

"If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts "unto your children, how much more shall your "heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that "ask him;" and "if any man have not the Spirit of "Christ, he is none of his." As he is the Spirit of truth, it is his office to lead us into all truth, and to teach us all things, for he searches and reveals the deep things of God. It is expressly promised to the true church, that "all her children shall be taught of the Lord," (*Is.* liv. 13.) Referring to this, Christ hath

declared that "none can come unto him, except he "be drawn of the Father," and "taught of God." (*John* vi. 44, 45.) And St. *Paul* declares, that "The *natural man* receiveth not the things of the "Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nei- "ther can he know them, because they are spiritually "discerned." (1 *Cor.* ii. 14.) The *natural man psychikos*) is explained in *Jude*, by *not having the Spirit;* which is evidently the Apostle's meaning in this passage: for in the preceding verse he declares that he "preached the gospel, "not in words which man's "wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." On these grounds I concluded that man's natural understanding could not spiritually or profitably receive the knowledge of revealed mysteries, unless it were enlightened by the Holy Spirit. I learned also, that our eyes may be blinded by Satan, the god and prince of this world; that our understandings may be closed, and a veil be upon our hearts, when we read the word of God; in which case the letter of the Scriptures, without the spirit, only killeth. Hence the need of the "understanding being opened to understand the "Scriptures;" for want of which, the plainest discourses of our Lord to his disciples, concerning his sufferings, death, and resurrection, were hidden from them, and they understood them not. The veil also must be taken from the heart, for want of which the *Jews*, in reading the *Old Testament*, cannot understand the plainest declarations of *Moses* and the prophets, concerning their promised Saviour.

The Scriptures also every where declare that true

wisdom is the gift of God, and must be asked of him by every one who would be wise unto salvation; "that the secret of the Lord is with them that fear "him;" and that those "who receive not the love of "the truth, that they may be saved, are given over "to a strong delusion to believe a lie; that they might "all be damned who believe not the truth, but have "pleasure in unrighteousness." (2 *Thes.* ii. 10—12.)

On these grounds, and depending upon the promises and invitations, so plentifully interspersed throughout the Scriptures; when I began to enquire after the truth, I was led also in some measure to cry unto the Lord for his guidance and teaching; and as my mind grew more engaged, and my difficulties, in extricating myself from the labyrinths of controversy, increased, I became more and more earnest, constant, and particular, in making my requests known unto God. My constant prayer to the Lord was, to be delivered from pride and prejudice, blindness of heart, contempt of the truth, obstinacy, enthusiasm, ignorance, and error: and that the Lord would give me wisdom and knowledge, guide me to the truth as it is in Jesus, open my understanding, take away the veil from my heart, and make known unto me the way of salvation which is revealed to sinners in his holy word. Thus waiting upon the Lord according to his own appointment, depending on him, and pleading his promises from day to day, I was led from one thing to another, until my view of religious truth was totally changed.—This I most firmly believe to have been by the promised teaching of the Spirit of truth, powerfully enlightening my mind, opening the Scriptures, and by

dispelling the clouds of error and prejudice, enabling me to receive the truth in faith and love. I am conscious that I have no intention, in speaking thus publickly on such a subject, but to advance the glory of God in the salvation of souls. But, as in his presence, I must declare that I have prayed over many of the most interesting passages of scripture, chapter by chapter, and often verse by verse, with the most anxious dread of rejecting or mistaking the truth, or embracing a falsehood; and with the most earnest desire of knowing what that doctrine was which Jesus and his apostles taught.—In the sight of God I am sensible, I have abundant cause to be humbled, and ashamed of my frequent remissness and the continual defilements of my prayers: but as surely as I believe his promises to be faithful, as surely as I believe him to be a God that heareth prayer; so surely do I believe that flesh and blood hath not revealed to me the doctrines I now preach, but God himself by his Holy Spirit.

Reader, whoever thou art, if thy conscience testify that thou hast hitherto lived in the neglect of this important duty, or in the formal, lifeless, unmeaning performance of it with thy lips, while thy heart hath been disengaged, and thy thoughts allowedly wandering to the ends of the earth; if thou hast not been accustomed by fervent prayer to seek wisdom from God by his teaching Spirit; if thou knowest not what it is to exercise faith upon the promises pointed out to thee, nor to plead them in prayer to a promise-keeping God; if all thy knowledge of divine things hath been acquired by leaning to thy own understanding;

if in reading the Scriptures, thou hast looked more to learned criticks, commentators, and expositors, than to the illuminating Spirit of God: then be as sure, as the word of God is true, and as we are concerned in it, that the light which is in thee is darkness, and that thou knowest nothing yet as thou oughtest to know.—May the Lord effectually incline thine heart to take a contrary course, and to seek wisdom where alone it can be found, even from the Lord, "the Father of "lights, and the giver of every good and perfect gift," who hath invited and commanded thee to ask, that it may be given thee!

VI. I would observe that there is nothing in this narrative, which can *reasonably* be condemned as *enthusiasm*.

It is allowed that *enthusiasm*, properly so called, frequently accompanies religious zeal; that in some of its operations it is a grievous evil, and in all attended with many inconveniencies; and that it ought very carefully to be guarded against by every religious professor and zealous preacher. It would also be in vain to pretend that the late revivals of religion, which have been indiscriminately stigmatized with the name of *Methodism*, have been, in opinion and practice, entirely free from this enthusiasm. For, what revivals of religion ever were free from scandals? Where the Lord sows his good seed, there the enemy will be sure to scatter his tares.—It must be confessed that some of the most eminent instruments in this work, whose names, when prejudice shall vanish, will be handed down with honour, as burning and shining lights, to the latest periods of the church, have, by the great-

ness of their zeal, through human frailty, been betrayed into sentiments, expressions, and deportment, in some instances, justly to be censured as enthusiastical; of which their enemies have not failed sufficiently to avail themselves.—But, whatever indiscretions and mistakes particular persons who have preached these doctrines may have fallen into, this doth not, in the judgment of candid and impartial persons, in the least affect the general cause, or prove the doctrines erroneous. We would not contend for the credit of individuals, or the interests of a party, but for the doctrines of God's word, and of the established Church of *England*. These will continue true and important, though many of those, who have zealously and successfully preached them, may have justly incurred the charge of enthusiasm: and I would confidently insist on it, that a man may be led to the belief of these doctrines, in a way of sober rational enquiry, and zealously preach them, without being an enthusiast.

It would be very well, if some of those, who so readily accuse whole bodies, of apparently religious persons, of enthusiasm, would favour us with their determinate definition of an *enthusiast*. In its original meaning the word has a very favourable sense, and implies, that, by a *divine* influence upon the soul, a man is filled with an ardour and warmth of zeal in the cause he is engaged in.—Now, "it is good to be "zealously affected always in a good thing:" and, if our ardour of soul be from the Spirit of God, according to the revealed will of God, and for the glory of God, it is the noblest, most desirable, most heavenly,

and most beneficial exertion of the human mind.—In every thing but religion, an ardour, described by the term *enthusiasm*, is allowed and commended: a *poetical*, a *military*, or a *patriotick enthusiasm*, even when it carries men beyond the strict bounds of cold reasonings and exact prudence, fails not to meet with admirers. Our zeal may be fervent in every thing without censure, unless we be zealous for the glory of God, and the salvation of immortal souls! But there is an *enthusiasm* of this sort which forms the highest elevation, and the noblest effort of the human mind. Such an enthusiasm animated the apostle *Paul* in all his self-denying labours and sufferings, and filled his writings, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, with the most ardent zeal for the honour of his dear Saviour, and affection for the souls of men. Such an enthusiasm he expresses, when he says, (2 *Cor.* v. 13, 14.) "Whether we be beside ourselves it is to "God, or whether we be sober, it is for your cause; "for the love of Christ constraineth us." Of this enthusiasm I wish I were far more guilty.—But on the other hand, there is danger of a counterfeit pernicious enthusiasm; and about that we are at present enquiring. Now, I apprehend, that in order to constitute this culpable enthusiasm, some one or more of the following things must appear. *Either the ardour of soul excited proceeds from a heated imagination, or from a delusion of Satan, instead of being produced by a divine influence;* or *the cause in which this ardour is employed is the cause of error and wickedness, instead of the cause of God and truth;* or *it exerts itself in unjustifiable measures and practices.* For if our

ardour be *warranted by the word of God*, if it *do not tend to the dishonour of God*, and if *it be confined in its exercise to the rules and precepts of the word of God:—how intense soever it may be*, I can see no cause to censure it; unless men can be too zealous for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls.

But whatever be the distinguishing criterion of enthusiasm, I suppose it will be difficult to fix a charge of it upon any thing for which I plead in this narrative. I never was taught by impulses, impressions, visions, dreams, or revelations; except so far as the work of the Spirit, in enlightening the understanding for the reception of the truths contained in the Holy Scriptures, is sometimes stiled revelation. Other revelation I never expected. Not but that the Lord is sovereign, and may do what he will with his own: and if he pleases, may, and I suppose sometimes does, go out of the ordinary course, for the conversion of a sinner, or the guidance of a perplexed, or the comfort of a distressed, soul; but I never took one step in dependence on any such extraordinary interpositions, nor ever encouraged any person so to do. And surely it will not be called *enthusiasm*, by any but avowed infidels, to believe God's word to be the standard of truth, and his promises to be faithful, and in this belief to seek for the knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel, in the manner above related. In this way I have been taught no new truths; but, as I believe, have been shown the meaning, use, tendency, consistency, harmony, wisdom, and glory of those truths, which are contained in the sacred volume; but which before, through pride and ignorance, I

perverted, neglected, reviled, and counted foolishness.—Nor do I make any pretences to infallibility. God hath not, I trust, left me so unstable, as to float about in the uncertain stream of opinion, and to be tossed "to and fro with every wind of doctrine, by the "sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby "they lay in wait to deceive."—As to the grand doctrines of the gospel, which I have marked out as *necessary to salvation*, they are neither so uncertain nor so difficult, as men would persuade us: their uncertainty and difficulty arise wholly from our pride, prejudice, love of sin, and inattentive ignorance of our own hearts. There is really much difficulty in bringing vain man to cease from leaning to his own understanding; and in prevailing with him to trust in the Lord with all his heart, and to be willing, in the humble posture of a little child, to be taught of God. Nothing but a deep conviction of guilt, a fear of wrath, and a sense of our lost condition by nature and practice, can bring our minds into this submissive frame: but, this being effected, the difficulty is over, and the way of salvation is so plain, that "the way-faring man, though a fool, shall not err therein." As to the other doctrines which I myself believe, though they seem plain enough to me, I desire not to proselyte others to them, but am willing to leave them as matters in which fallible men may differ without danger. And, as to my sufficiency for the faithful discharge of my ministry, to God's glory, and the salvation of souls, he will not, I trust, deceive my expectations, which are grounded on his promises.—For the rest, I mistake daily, and find myself in continual danger of mixing my own imaginations with his divine truth, and of following

my own spirit instead of his. Whatever I preach truly or do wisely, to God be the glory; for I am not sufficient of myself to think a good thought: whatever I speak falsely, or do foolishly, to me be the shame; for it is the natural fruit of my own deceitful heart. If this be enthusiasm, it is an enthusiasm warranted, not only by the word of God, as I have endeavoured to prove, but by the whole liturgy of our Church. We all at ordination profess to be 'moved by the Holy Ghost,' to take the ministerial office upon us, and assuredly we cannot be moved by the Holy Ghost, if we neither have the Holy Ghost, nor may expect his help and guidance! We agree to pray, 'that the Lord would lead into the way of truth all 'such as have erred and are deceived; that he would 'illuminate all Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, with 'true knowledge and understanding of his holy word;' that he would 'cleanse our hearts by the inspiration 'of his Holy Spirit;' that, 'he would grant us true repentance and his Holy Spirit;' with much more to this effect: and I am persuaded, that such a confidence as I have expressed, cannot be censured as enthusiasm, without including our Church-establishment and continual publick worship in the same charge.

VII. Lastly, I would observe that our opposers and despisers will seldom give us the hearing. With all their pretensions to candour, reasoning, and free enquiry, they accuse and condemn us without so much as knowing, with any tolerable degree of accuracy, what our sentiments are; although furnished with such plentiful means of information, in those numerous

publications which are now extant upon these subjects.

Having imbibed strong prejudices against us, they frame so contemptible an opinion of our understandings and writings, that they will not bestow so much pains, or afford us so much regard, as to peruse our books: and to call an author a *Methodist*, is with many people a sufficient reason why they should not read his works.—Hence it comes to pass, that for want of information our doctrines are grievously misrepresented: and in general the attacks made upon us, though calculated to make our persons odious and despised, do not in the least effect the argument in debate. Our adversaries in general know little of our opinions, except what they have picked up by *hear-say*, in which neither the connexion, consistency, tendency, nor application of those opinions is preserved: no wonder therefore that we are vilified, and reproached with things to which we are utter strangers, or which we abominate and protest against from sabbath to sabbath, and against which we neglect not to fill our writings with reasonings, warnings, and cautions.

For my own part I freely acknowledge, that my strongest objections against this scheme of doctrine arose wholly from *misapprehension and mistake*. Not having read their books, my notions of the doctrines of the *Methodists* were received from vulgar report, and from their enemies; while my creative imagination put its own construction on them, and drew terrible consequences from them: so that when I preached against them, I was as one fighting with his own shadow; and in speaking evil of those things that I

knew not, I only betrayed my own ignorance and pride.—No better founded are the lamentable outcries, which at this day are made against our principles, as if they tended to banish reason, argument, sober-mindedness, and morality out of the world; and in their stead to substitute a set of whimsical vagaries, which are without foundation in reason or Scripture, and have no influence, or rather a pernicious influence, on our conduct and conversation.—When such a declamation is ended, (for one would not interrupt it,) ask the declaimer what a *Methodist* is? he can scarcely give you an answer:—enquire about the doctrines of the Methodists,—he does not understand them;—or their writings,—he has never read them!

Reader, if thou desire to know what our opinions are, and what foundation there is for these heavy charges, read our books: but read them with attention, and aim at impartiality; compare them with the word of God, and with the liturgy, articles, and homilies of the church of *England;* and, if thou have leisure and opportunity, with the works of our first reformers. Nor do we desire thee to renounce thy *reason*, but only to make this *reasonable* concession;—that where thy reason is ready to determine one way, but God hath expressly determined another way, thou wouldst allow him to understand his own mysteries better than thou dost; and that therefore thou oughtest, by faith exercised upon the veracity of God, to receive *implicitly and without reasoning*, those doctrines which God hath expressly revealed, and which thy reason feels to be far above out of its reach, and therefore doubtless out of its province. Wherever, on such enquiry, thou discoverest us to be mistaken,

there dissent from us, yea, blame us as far as meekness and candour will permit: but do not condemn us in the gross; do not assert our whole scheme of doctrine to be enthusiastical and groundless, though some of our writers should be found to have advanced questionable opinions. This were the way to drive all truth and certainty out of the world; for what book can be mentioned, the Bible excepted, in which there is nothing advanced, either erroneous or questionable?

And be assured, that to read only one side of the question, and then clamorously to adopt every childish cavil, every vague report, every scandalous falsehood; and industriously to propagate them, as if these afforded a sufficient confutation of all the arguments, authorities, and scriptural testimonies, with which we support our sentiments; is no evidence of a candid liberal mind, or of a sincere desire to know the truth.—Let it also be observed, that though some professors have been proved enthusiasts, and others detected to be hypocrites, this does not prove that we are all enthusiasts and hypocrites. Such rash judgments are most hurtful to those who pass them.

For myself, I here publickly profess, that I will, to the end of my days, acknowledge it as the greatest obligation that any person can confer on me, if, in the spirit of meekness, he will point out to me any error, or enthusiastical delusion into which I have fallen, and by sufficient arguments convince me of it. I trust, that my earnest desire to discover "the truth as it is "in Jesus," has not abated in its influence; and that I still retain the same disinterested resolution to em-

brace and adhere to it, with which I set out. Still am I solicitously fearful of being betrayed by warmth of spirit, and by the deceitfulness of my heart, into erroneous opinions. But clamour and reproach, objections and arguments brought against sentiments I detest, or consequences I cannot see to be fairly deducible from our doctrines; or such reasonings as set one divine attribute at variance with another, make one part of the Bible contradict another, or exalt the human understanding upon the tribunal, and arraign and condemn revealed mysteries at her presumptuous bar; will have no weight at all with me, or with any who ever knew the grace of God in truth.

And now, my dear reader, let me conclude, with leaving it upon thy conscience to search for the truth of the gospel in the study of God's word, accompanied by prayer, as thou wouldst search for hid treasure. I give thee this counsel, expecting to meet thee at the day of judgment, that our meeting may be with joy, and not with grief; may the Lord incline thee to follow it, with that solemn season full in view! —Time how short! eternity how long! life how precarious, and vanishing! death how certain! the pursuits and employments of this present life how vain, unsatisfying, trifling, and vexatious! God's favour and eternal life how unspeakably precious! His wrath, the never-quenched fire, the never-dying worm, how dreadful!—O, trifle not away the span of life, in heaping up riches, which shortly must be left for ever, and which profit not in the day of wrath; in such pleasures and amusements as will issue in eternal torments; or in seeking that glory, which shall be swallowed up in everlasting infamy. Agree but with me

in this,—that it is good to redeem precious time, to "labour for the meat that endureth unto everlasting "life;" and to attend principally to the "one thing "needful;"—take but thy measure *of truth* as well as *duty* from the word of God, be willing to be taught of God, meditate on his word day and night; let it be "the light of thy feet," and the "lantern of thy "paths;" and, in studying it, "lean not to thy own "understanding," trust not implicitly to expositors and commentators, but ask wisdom and teaching of God. Be not a *Felix*, saying to thy serious apprehensions about thy soul,—"Go your way at this "time, when I have a convenient season, I will call "for you;" lest death and judgment come before that season:—and be not an *Agrippa*, almost persuaded to be a *Christian;* but seek to be altogether such as the primitive *Christians* were. I say agree with me in these reasonable requests, and we shall at length agree in all things;—in many, in this world;—in all, when we hear the Son of God address us in these rejoicing words,—"Come ye blessed of my "Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from "the foundation of the world."—May the Lord vouchsafe unto the writer, and to every reader, of this narrative, "that wisdom which is from above;" that teaching of his Holy Spirit, which guides into the ways of peace; that faith which justifies and works by love; that peace of God which passeth understanding; and that measure of sanctifying and strengthening grace, which may enable each of us to be "stedfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work "of the Lord, as knowing that our labour shall not be "in vain in the Lord."

SERMONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. John xv, 5.

Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth. John xvii, 17.

SERMON I.

DEUTERONOMY XXXII, 47.

It is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life.

THE honoured servant of God, whose words are here selected, was favoured with health and the unabated force of all his faculties, at a very advanced time of life: and, so far from claiming a privilege of relaxation from labour, he seems, as death approached, to have redoubled his diligence, in order that the Israelites might have the things which he had taught them in perpetual remembrance. The hoary head is indeed a crown of glory, when thus found in the way of righteousness: and "blessed is that servant, whom "his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing."

Among other methods of durably impressing the minds of the people, Moses was directed to compose a prophetick song; as poems are generally learned with greater eagerness, and remembered more easily, than other compositions: and at the close of this sacred song he thus addressed the people, "Set your "hearts unto all the words, which I testify among "you this day, which ye shall command your chil- "dren to observe to do, even all the words of this

ing the full perfection of all that is adorable and excellent.

The message teaches us our relations and obligations to this glorious God, as our Creator, from whom we derive our being and all our capacities; "in whom "we live, and move, and are," and, "who giveth us "all things richly to enjoy;" and as our Governor and Judge, to whom we are in all respects accountable. It further assures us, that our souls are immortal; that our bodies will rise again from the dead; that after death is the judgment; and that a state of eternal retributions will succeed to the present transitory scene. And after all the conjectures and boasted demonstrations of philosophers, even these fundamental doctrines must rest entirely on the sure testimony of God: for could it be proved with certainty that the soul is naturally immortal, who could know, whether the Creator might not see good to annihilate it, now it is contaminated with sin? So that in every sense, "life "and immortality are brought to light by the gospel."

The same message from God makes known to us his holy law, in its extensive, spiritual, and reasonable requirements, and awful sanction; with the rules of his providential government. It instructs us in the malignant nature and fatal consequences of sin; and gives us a general intimation of the manner in which this destructive evil entered into the world: though it does not satisfy our curiosity by fully explaining that mysterious subject, the difficulties of which are not peculiar to any religious system. But it far more copiously and clearly instructs us in the way, by which

we may be saved from sin and misery, which is unspeakably more conducive to our advantage.

The scriptures are indeed more especially a message from God to us, concerning the person and salvation of Christ. "This is the record that God hath "given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."* This is the centre of revelation, in which all the lines meet from every part of its ample circumference. The everlasting mercy of God in purposing the salvation of sinful men; his infinite wisdom, forming the grand design of glorifying his justice and holiness, even in pardoning and blessing those who deserved the most tremendous punishment; his unfathomable love in giving his only-begotten Son to be the Saviour of the world; the "great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the "flesh," Emmanuel purchasing the church with his own blood; the love of Christ in his obedience unto the death of the cross for us; his glorious resurrection, ascension, and mediatorial exaltation;—these constitute the central and most essential part of the message of God to us. "This," says he, by a voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I "am well pleased: hear ye him."

Revelation also announces to us our real situation in this world, as criminals condemned to die: "Dust "ye are, and to dust ye shall return." This sentence will certainly and shortly be executed upon every one of us; but we are also liable to a more awful condem-

* 1 John v, 11, 12.

nation in another world, from which deliverance may now be obtained. We are therefore respited from day to day: or rather we are put to death by a lingering execution; as every pain, disease, or natural decay, is an anticipation of the separating stroke. But we are placed under a dispensation of mercy, and it is the grand concern of our fleeting days to seek the forgiveness of our sins and the salvation of our souls, before the opportunity be for ever gone. The message therefore warns all men to flee from the wrath to come, commands them to repent and believe in Christ, and exhorts them without delay to forsake and break loose from every object, which keeps them from "fleeing "for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them" in the gospel.

The sacred Scriptures give us likewise most important information concerning the holy Spirit; as the Author of divine life, and the Giver of wisdom, strength, holiness, and consolation; as engaged to give efficacy to the word of salvation by his regenerating influences; and as promised to all those who pray for the inestimable benefit. "If ye, being evil, know "how to give good gifts unto your children, how much "more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit "to them that ask him."*

The same divine message prescribes also the means by which we may apply for these blessings, and render our Benefactor the tribute of thankful adoration. It directs us to diligent and persevering investigation

* Luke xi, 13.

of the scriptures; and to continual earnestness in prayer: it reveals to us our God upon a throne of grace, to which we are invited to approach through a merciful and faithful high Priest; suggests pleas to be used in our supplications; and sets before us exceedingly great and precious promises, to direct our desires and animate our hopes: and it appoints other ordinances, in which we may wait on the Lord, and renew our strength, that we may run with patience the race set before us. We are also informed in the same manner, that there is an innumerable company of holy angels, who worship before the throne of God, and are nevertheless "all sent forth to minister unto the heirs of salvation:" and on the other hand, that there are fallen angels, numerous, powerful, subtle, malicious, and indefatigable, who watch every opportunity of doing us mischief, and especially of deceiving, defiling, and ruining our souls; from whose devices we can have no security but in the protection and guidance of him, who "was manifested to destroy the works of the "devil."

Finally, the message of God shows us the peculiar character, motives, and conflicts of those who are truly religious; and distinguishes them from all other persons: and it gives directions, instructions, examples, cautions, and encouragement sufficient to render us wise unto salvation, and thoroughly furnished unto every good work. This view of the subject is indeed too compendious to give us an adequate idea of it; but it must suffice for our present purpose. We proceed therefore—

II. To illustrate the import of the declaration, "It

" is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life." " Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God *in vain*;" that is, to confirm a false or doubtful assertion, or in a trifling concern. This may throw light upon the subject before us. The message contained in the scriptures does not relate to things false or doubtful. There are indeed religious impostors, deluded enthusiasts, and priestly usurpations; but all religion is not enthusiasm or priestcraft: General declamations to this effect only prove that men are *unable* or *unwilling* to distinguish betwixt the genuine and the counterfeit; which evinces, that either their understandings or their hearts are very faulty.—The apostle Peter, just before his martyrdom, endeavouring that the disciples might be able after his disease to have the things he had taught them always in remembrance, added,—" For we have not followed cun-
" ningly-devised fables, when we made known to you
" the power and coming of the Lord Jesus, but were
" eye witnesses of his majesty: for he received from
" God the Father honour and glory, when there came
" such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This
" is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.
" And this voice which came from heaven we heard,
" when we were with him on the holy mount." But aware that the belief of this event depended entirely on his testimony, with that of James and John, he subjoined—" We have also a more sure word of pro-
" phecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as
" to a light shining in a dark place, until the day
" dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts."*

* 2 Peter i, 16—19.

It may indeed be argued very forcibly, that the *publick* miracles, recorded in scripture, could never have obtained credit among contemporaries, had they not been actually performed; and that no future generation of Israelites or Christians could possibly have been persuaded, that their forefathers had always believed them, had the report been afterwards invented and propagated. Would it, for instance, by any method be practicable, to bring the inhabitants of this nation to believe that a hundred years ago the Prince of Orange, at the revolution, marched an army through the German ocean, and that this had always been known and credited?

The argument therefore from miracles openly performed, or publickly attested, before those possessed of power, and engaged by interest, reputation, and inclination to disprove them, is very conclusive: and perhaps no past event was ever so fully authenticated, as the resurrection of Christ, on which the whole fabrick of revelation in some respects depends. Yet *to us* the word of prophecy may be said to be still more sure: for a system of predictions of remote events, which no finite mind could possibly foresee, is interwoven with every part of the scriptures, and reaches from the first promise of the seed of the woman, to the close of the sacred canon. These have been exactly fulfilling through successive ages, in respect of the Jews and the surrounding nations; the coming of the Messiah, and every circumstance of that grand event; with the subsequent concerns of the church and of the world to this present day. This forms such a demonstration, that the Bible is indeed the word of God;

that the more carefully it is examined with a serious and impartial mind, the fuller conviction it must produce. It is indeed a kind of unobstrusive permanent miracle, which escapes the notice of the careless, but gives entire satisfaction to the diligent enquirer: and to this, all who have doubts on the subject, will "do "well to take heed, as to a light shining in a dark "place," till their own experience of the blessed effects produced by the gospel, prove an inward witness, the dawn of eternal life in their souls.

We might adduce many other arguments in confirmation of this truth, from the nature and tendency of the sacred oracles; the character of those in every age, who have most firmly believed them; the efficacy of the pure gospel on the minds and conduct of mankind, in rendering them wise, holy, peaceful, and happy; and the manifold blessed consequences, which must follow, if all men did indeed repent of sin, believe in Christ, worship God spiritually, love him supremely, and love one another with a pure heart fervently. But these few hints are sufficient to shew that our religion is no vain or doubtful matter, but an authenticated revelation from God; and that men oppose it, because it testifies of them that their works are evil, and cannot be made consistent with the "lust "of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of "life."

Neither is it a superfluous or unnecessary thing. Whatever plausible and soothing notions students in their retirement may entertain; facts undeniably prove, that reason, untutored by revelation, uniformly leads men into atheism, idolatry, impiety, superstition, or

enormous wickedness. Renowned and elegant Greece and Rome sunk as deep into these absurd abominations, as the barbarians whom they despised. The philosophical Athenians were ignorant worshippers of an unknown God, amidst their highest improvements; nor have the most celebrated modern unbelievers been preserved from most gross absurdities, or lamentable ignorance. How perplexed and unsatisfactory are their discourses, when they attempt to shew, in what way a sinner may be justified before God! Or when they would instruct mankind, in the method of conquering bad habits, resisting strong temptations, overcoming the world, or meeting death with humble, serious, and reflecting composure!

If then unaided reason, in its highest advancement, can give so little satisfactory information on these most important points; what must have been the state of the world at large, if revelation had not been vouchsafed? So far therefore from deeming it unnecessary, we ought to value it unspeakably more than gold and precious stones; and to relish it "as sweeter than ho-"ney and the honey-comb."

The message of God is no vain thing, because it is exactly adapted to the condition of mankind, and fully adequate to the case of the most enslaved sinner upon earth. If a man's crimes have been ever so numerous, complicated, and atrocious, during the whole course of a long life; if his propensities, habits, and connexions, expose him to the combined force of many formidable temptations; and if his difficulties and distresses be urgent in the extreme;—yet, by attending to the word of the gospel in humble faith,

he shall surely be guided into the way of peace, find effectual assistance in the path of duty, be extricated from all perplexities, made victorious over all enemies, and finally be brought to the enjoyment of eternal felicity. Indeed whenever we mistake our duty or our interest, or whenever we are cast down on any account, it may be said to us, "Ye do err, not knowing the "scriptures;" and forget that "thus it is written, and thus it must be." We want no other directions, or encouragements, than such as are contained in the Bible: nothing can be added to this perfect rule of faith and practice. All that we can do in this matter to good purpose, consists in calling the attention of mankind to the scriptures, explaining their contents, and exhorting them to believe and obey the divine message: and if any one, whether he be a moralist or a philosopher, an inventor of superstitions, or pretender to new revelations, attempt to add to the Scriptures, or to amend any thing in them; he may be compared to an optician, who should undertake, by new discoveries, and well-constructed glasses, to improve the light of the sun.

Nor is the message of scripture a vain thing, or *a matter of small importance:* Moses therefore added, "because it is your life." "Whatsoever a man hath will he give for his life," is a maxim that is generally found true, though it was once spoken by the father of lies. The merchant throws his rich freight into the sea, when it endangers his life: and the patient rewards the surgeon for performing some torturing operation, when it is necessary to rescue him from death. In ordinary computations life is deemed our highest interest; capital punishment is regarded

as the most formidable; and it is an *admired*, though often a proud and rebellious heroism, when a man prefers death to penury, ignominy, or bondage. Yet our Lord hath said, "Fear not them that kill the "body, and after that have no more that they can "do; but fear him, who hath power to destroy both "body and soul in hell." And "what is a man "profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his "own soul?" Our temporal life is not principally concerned in the subject before us, but our future and eternal condition. When Christ declares, "These "shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the "righteous into life eternal;" the same original word is used in both clauses: the punishment could not be *eternal*, if the person punished should at length cease to exist; and the strongest expressions of the copious Greek language, that language of speculating philosophers, are used in scripture to denote the eternity of the punishment, prepared for the wicked in another world. We are not competent to determine what sin deserves, or how it behoves the Governor of the universe to show his abhorrence of it. "Shall not the "Judge of all the earth do right?" It is our wisdom to submit to his justice and to seek his mercy; and not to waste our lives in vain disputations, concerning matters too deep for our investigation.

We must, however, close this part of the subject in a summary manner.—It depends on the reception which we give the message of God, whether we shall for ever enjoy his inestimable favour, or feel the weight of his awful indignation; whether our capacity of reflection, memory, and anticipation shall be our

noblest privilege, or our most aggravated misery; whether we shall bear the holy image of God, or be given up to the unrestrained dominion of every hateful passion; and whether happy angels or apostate spirits shall be our companions, during our eternal existence. In the mean time, this must also determine, whether in the present life we shall possess that peace of God which passeth all understanding; or resemble the tempestuous waters of the ocean, in the dissatisfied and unsettled state of our minds; whether we shall pass through life with comfort and usefulness, and meet death in joyful hope; or spend our days in vanity and vexation, and at length be driven away into darkness and despair.

The scriptures certainly require all who would "declare the whole counsel of God," to use this decided language: and whatever plausibility may appear in the reasonings or conjectures of those that become the advocates of the heathen, whom St. Paul declared to be "without excuse;" it is impossible, consistently with scripture, to entertain the least hope concerning persons who reject revelation, and prefer their own self-flattering imaginations to the sure testimony of God. It hath therefore been sufficiently shown, that the subjects of which we treat, as far as we adhere to scripture, are most certain, necessary, and important; and that, in comparison, all the objects, which ambition, avarice, or sensuality pursue, are frivolous as the toys of children, and transient as a dream when one awaketh.

III. Then let us conclude the subject by a practical improvement.

It can scarcely be expected that they, who avowedly disregard all religion, will trouble themselves to attend to these instructions: otherwise, we might very forcibly insist on the folly and madness of their conduct. We would say to such men, 'Do you act upon principle?' or do you not? If you answer in the affirmative, you profess yourselves to be atheists, or at least to hold sentiments which are practically equivalent to atheism. But does any one of those frantick enthusiasts whom you despise, imagine so wild an absurdity, as they do, who ascribe this fair creation, in which wise contrivance and boundless goodness emulate each other, to blind chance or necessity; or imagine a Creator, who totally disregards the work of his own hands? But were this absurd principle, which contradicts demonstrable truths, as near to certainty as it is possible, what would you gain by it? Should you at last find yourselves mistaken, your loss would be infinite; should you be right in your notion, you have not the smallest advantage: unless you choose to own, that as *you* spend your lives, it will be an advantage to die like the brutes, and that the atheism of your understandings springs from the depraved affections of your hearts.

But if you allow that there is a God, who created and governs the world, on whom all are dependent, and to whom all are accountable: how infatuated must you be, to live as if there were none! never to enquire what your Creator commands or forbids! To be indifferent whether he be pleased or displeased! Wantonly to do those things, against which your consciences protest, as contrary to the will of God! Bestowing

no pains to avert his wrath, when you know you have offended him! But wasting your lives in palling sensualities, insipid dissipations, wearisome pursuits, and a constant succession of vain expectations, bitter disappointments, and multiplied crimes, till a hopeless death drops the curtain, and closes the mournful scene!

And are you then entitled, as persons of superior discernment and sagacity, to treat pious christians with supercilious contempt, as men of weak intellects and disordered minds? When all the instances of credulity and indiscretion, which the whole company of religious people through all generations have exhibited, bear no manner of proportion to the madness and folly of an irreligious life.

Supposing however, that you do pay some attention to this most important concern: is it not also evident, from the subject we have been considering, that you ought to bestow great pains to discover the true religion, and to discriminate it from all others? Numbers are of opinion, that people should adhere to the religion in which they were educated: but does not this imply that they deem all religion a vain and trifling matter? A nation may retain some inconvenient usages, without much censure: but to support unjust and ruinous laws, because their fathers did so, would imply a most unreasonable and detestable obstinacy. Thus some circumstances in religion may perhaps be retained, because they are deemed venerable for their antiquity; but its grand essentials are our life, and we are ruined, if we prefer human tradition to divine revelation. Such an opinion vindicates the Jews in re-

jecting the gospel, and exculpates those who cried out "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." It espouses the cause of pagans, Mahometans, and papists; while it condemns prophets, apostles, martyrs, and zealous reformers: and in short it considers it criminal to oppose any established error or imposition. But the monstrous deformity of this tenet must be visible, whenever it is brought forth to the light; and we need only exhort every one to consider the subject with application to himself, and to act accordingly. It will then be deemed most *rational* to examine with diligent and impartial care the evidences of divine revelation; and, if the mind be satisfied in this respect, daily to search the scriptures, with earnest prayer for divine instruction, according to the apostle's exhortation, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, "who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth "not."—But let it be also remembered, that multitudes study religion as a science, and thus adopt a scriptural creed, yea, are useful in propagating the truth, who yet are not themselves truly religious. Nay, many have prophesied and wrought miracles, who have been at the same time workers of iniquity. Notions may float in the understanding, when they do not durably affect the heart, or influence the conduct: but unless the truth be an engrafted and sanctifying principle in the soul, it must be "held in unrighteousness;" and such a religion is indeed a vain thing, though vital christianity is unspeakbly valuable and important.

Our Lord requires his disciples to "seek first the "kingdom of God and his righteousness." We

should set out in early youth with this most important business: but if we have wasted a great part of our lives already, we should immediately attend to it with proportionable earnestness and industry. We should begin every year, month, week, and day, with this one thing needful; to which the prime of our affections, and the best of our hours should be dedicated: and all other pursuits if possible rendered subservient. "Labour not then," my friends, "for the meat that "perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto "everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give you." If this be neglected, all is lost, whatever else may seem to succeed: if this be secured, all things will surely turn out to your advantage.

While we therefore call upon you in the name of Christ, "to strive to enter in at the strait gate;" to deny yourselves and bear your cross for his sake: and to beware that no earthly object rival him in your affections: while we warn you, that it is impossible to serve God and Mammon, and remind you that the friendship of the world is enmity with God: or while we endeavour to prevail with you, "to count all things "but loss, that you may win Christ, and be found in "him:"—what do we but inculcate the maxims of heavenly wisdom? Does any prudent man hesitate to renounce an inferior interest, when it comes in competition with a greater, or to neglect some trivial concern, when business of the last importance demands his attention? And who, almost, refuses to part with a right hand, in order to preserve his life? But alas; "the children of this world are wiser in their genera-"tion than the children of light."

The worldly man having selected his object, gives it his most decided preference; he adopts and persists in the most suitable means of success; he exercises self-denial in various ways, devises new expedients, never loses sight of his main point, and endeavours to render every thing, even religion itself, subservient to his grand design. But how different is the conduct of numbers who profess the gospel! How negligent are they of the means of grace! or how soon weary of attending on them! how trivial a matter serves as an excuse for omission, and how unwilling are they to venture or endure any thing in this momentous concern! Men in general are far more punctual to their commercial engagements, or even to their social appointments, than in the ordinances of God: and did lawyers or physicians study their several subjects, no more than nominal Christians do the Bible; or were the courtier as slack in waiting on his prince, as they are in coming to the throne of grace; how would men exclaim against their folly and inconsistency! Alas! even the true believer may reflect on the conduct of the prudent tradesman, the valiant soldier, and the candidate for royal or popular favour, till he is covered with shame and confusion.

But let us, my brethren, not yield to this supineness: let us examine the grounds on which we expect eternal life, as a prudent man would look into the title-deeds of a valuable estate. Let us endeavour to convince our children and relatives, by word and deed, that we seek these blessings for them also, as the grand concern: for alas! even where creeds and catechisms are taught, the conversation of the parlour,

and the general system of education, often suggest an opposite conclusion. Let us consider, that we make the best use of our talents, and are the best friends to our country and to mankind, when we most endeavour to promote the interests of true religion. And should we in this course meet with many discouragements, let us not be weary in well doing; for assuredly we shall reap in due season, if we faint not.

SERMON II.

DEUTERONOMY, vi, 6—9.

These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children; and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up: and thou shalt bind them as a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes; and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thine house, and on thy gates.

THE observation is not more common than just, 'that if religion be any thing it is every thing.' If Christianity be true, the consequences of our present conduct are infinitely important: and while the infidel may be more atrociously criminal and extensively mischievous; the professed believer, who lives like other men, is the most inconsistent character in the world. The language of scripture does not accord to that of modern times: wicked *Christians* and *irreligious believers* are never mentioned in the sacred volume; faith is never supposed separable from a holy

life: all worldly men are represented as unbelievers, or as only possessing a dead faith; and all believers are spoken of as the servants of God, who live to his glory, and are distinguished from other men by the whole tenour of their conduct, and not merely by their principles. These things are as observable in the old, as in the new, Testament: for true religion has been *essentially* the same ever since the fall of Adam, though many *circumstantial* alterations have taken place: and indeed the perfections of God, the wants of a sinner, and the nature of holiness and happiness are in themselves immutable.

I shall therefore without further introduction, proceed to discourse on the words of the text, as applicable to Christians, with an authority proportioned to their peculiar advantages. "These words which I "command thee this day," even the great doctrines and precepts of the Bible, "shall be in thy heart; and "thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children; and "thou shalt talk of them, when thou sittest in thine "house, and when thou walkest by the way, and "when thou liest down, and when thou risest up: and "thou shalt bind them upon thine hand, and they "shall be as frontlets between thine eyes: and thou "shalt write them upon the posts of thine house, and "on thy gates." It is, alas! too obvious, that professed Christians do not generally observe either the letter or the spirit of this exhortation: nay, that numbers of them would censure or ridicule any of their acquaintance, who should practise, according to it! Whether this prove that most men are Christians only in name, or whether some more satisfactory account

can be given of the undeniable fact, every one must determine for himself.

I shall endeavour from the words of the text,

I. To point out some of the leading principles of our holy religion, which especially demand our unremitted attention.

II. Explain and illustrate the exhortation, and suggest the most effectual methods of reducing it to practice.

III. Shew the reasonableness of such a conduct.

And may the Lord vouchsafe us his special help and blessing, while we meditate on this important subject! for it is astonishing and lamentable to observe, how slightly even they who seem to be religious pass over such urgent exhortations. So that while a vast majority of mankind are altogether asleep in sin, the rest seem not to be half awake to matters of infinite and eternal importance.

I. In pointing out some of the leading principles of our holy religion, which especially demand our most earnest attention, we cannot begin more properly than with the perfections and authority of God, and our relations and obligations to him. Though most men allow these truths; yet their conduct, in this respect, marks very strongly the distinction between the religious and irreligious part of mankind. Who can imagine, that the gay, the sensual, the covetous, or the ambitious, have a constant and serious recollection of that holy, omnipresent, omniscient, and almighty God, in whom we all profess to believe? May we not rather conclude, that "God is not in all

their thoughts;" at least, that they do not willingly consider his character as described in the sacred scriptures? Do such men habitually recollect the majesty and authority of the Lord, their obligation or accountableness to the Creator and Judge of the world? Do they act under a constant sense of his all-seeing eye? Do they endeavour to please him in their most secret and common actions, or by their inmost thoughts and motives? Do they seek happiness in his favour, and liberty in his service? Or do they, when conscious of having offended, rely on the mercy of God, and seek an interest in the salvation of his Son, as the grand object of their deliberate choice, and most fervent desires? I apprehend that the most admired and applauded characters, in Christian countries, are as entire strangers to this course of life, as the very pagans themselves.

It is indeed one great end of preaching, to convince men, that religion does not consist in coming once or twice a week to publick worship, or at stated seasons to the Lord's table: and that these are only appointed means of bringing them habitually to acknowledge God in every part of their conduct; that their actions, conversation, and dispositions, may be influenced by a sense of his presence and authority; that pious meditations, ejaculations, and praises, may habitually spring from the temper of their minds, as occasion requires; and that their daily employments, regulated by genuine piety, may be a constant succession of services to their Master who is in heaven.—Who can deny that the law of God requires this at our hands? that the example of Christ recommends and enforces

it? or that the apostle inculcates it, when he says, "Whether ye eat, or whether ye drink, or whatever "ye do, do all to the glory of God?" Perfection indeed cannot here be attained; nor can we say what measure of this habitual recollection is essential to genuine piety: but if this be the nature of true religion when perfected, it must proportionally be the same in its lowest degrees. If we do not propose to ourselves a high standard, our actual attainments will be very low: and if the *nature* of our religion differ from all our ideas of the worship and holiness of angels, we shall doubtless be finally excluded from their society, as incapable of their holy felicity.

The eternal world is another subject, which demands our unremitted attention. Death and its important consequences; and the awful realities of that solemn season, when "all that are in the graves shall hear the "voice of the Son of God and shall come forth; they "that have done good to the resurrection of life; and "they that have done evil to the resurrection of dam-"nation," should be familiar to our thoughts, and frequently be made the subject of our conversation. Eternity—the shortness of time—the uncertainty of life—the importance of this fleeting season of preparation for the tribunal of God—the sin, the folly and infatuation, of wasting it in the eager pursuit of perishing things, or in frivolous and pernicious amusements. By frequently recurring to these topicks, we should endeavour to excite ourselves, and to "exhort one "another, while it is called to-day; lest any of us should "be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." A mis-pent day, or even an idle hour, must on reflection

give pain to the man, who duly considers the words of Christ, "Watch and pray always, that ye may be "accounted worthy to escape all those things which "are coming on the earth, and to stand before the "Son of man." "Let your loins be girded about "and your lamps burning, and ye yourselves like un- "to men that wait for their Lord." "Be ye, therefore, "ready also: for in an hour that ye think not, the "Son of man cometh."

Our chief business is not with men: our grand interest is not placed in earthly objects. The Lord himself is "he with whom we have to do;" and if we are indeed believers, "we look not at the things which "are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for "the things which are seen are temporal, but the "things which are not seen are eternal." This was the case with all that cloud of witnesses which have gone before us. "Enoch walked with God and was not, for God took him." Moses preferred the reproach of Christ and the sufferings of God's people, to the riches, honours, and pleasures of Egypt:—for he "had respect to the recompence of reward." The Old Testament-saints "all died in faith, not hav- "ing received the promises, but having seen them "afar off; and were persuaded of them, and embraced "them, and confessed that they were strangers and "pilgrims upon the earth." The primitive Christians "suffered joyfully the spoiling of their goods, "knowing that they had in heaven a better and a more "enduring substance." They "counted not the suffer- "ings of this present time worthy to be compared "with the glory that shall be revealed:" and many of

them considered death "as their gain," that "being "absent from the body, they might be present with "the Lord." Yet in these days this kind of life not only appears visionary to profane scoffers and infidels; but many who profess and contend for the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, seem not at all aware, that one grand difference between a believer and other men, consists in the decided preference which he gives to eternal things, above all the interests and enjoyments of this sublunary world. "To be carnally minded "is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

The divine law should likewise occupy a large share of our thoughts and conversation. It is spiritual, holy, just, and good, and given to be the rule of our conduct, and the standard of our judgment, and it is written in the hearts of all true believers. Thus David exclaims, "Oh, how I love thy law! it is my "meditation all the day." "I esteem all thy precepts "in all things to be right." "I love thy command- "ments above gold, yea, above much fine gold:" and, "I will walk at liberty for I seek thy precepts."

Numbers of men called Christians, prescribe to themselves no other rule, than the law of fashion, custom, honour, or trade; that is, the law of their own peculiar circle. Others judge of their conduct by some scanty maxims of morality, or their own notions of right and wrong: and few, even of those who profess to believe, seem willing to use the commandments of God for these important purposes.—"Thou shalt "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, thy mind, "thy soul, and thy strength; and thou shalt love thy

"neighbour as thyself.". These are the two great commandments, in which the whole law is briefly comprehended. But who can fully explain such extensive precepts, or speak of them in terms of commendation equal to their excellency? There can be no part of our conduct or desire of our hearts; no thought, word, or action whatever; which does not either agree or disagree with these two grand branches of that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." With these, the believer, as far as he acts in character, compares himself continually; and thus determines, whether he hath acted right or wrong in the various circumstances and relations of life. By this rule he learns to decide in doubtful cases; and he keeps it in constant view, while he considers how he should spend his time, use his substance, or employ his talents; what connexions he should form; whether he should contract or extend his acquaintance; what business or situation he should prefer; or how he should regulate his methods and habits of living. In short, he endeavours, to conform himself to the law of God, as the man of fashion or of business does to the rules of the circle with which he is connected.

But when we have seriously considered the comprehensive, spiritual, and holy requirements of this perfect standard, we shall proportionably be convinced of numberless transgressions, and of immense deficiencies even in our best services: "for by the law is the knowledge of sin." We shall judge very differently of our own characters, than other men do; or than we ourselves did, before we began to weigh them in this balance of the sanctuary. When each successive hour, and all that passes in our thoughts and con-

duct, is tried by the law of loving God with all our minds, and our neighbour as ourselves, the boasted goodness of our hearts, the imagined innocency of our lives, the compensating efficacy of our meritorious actions, and the whole fabrick of our self-complacency, vanish "as a dream when one awaketh." Then we readily understand that "by the works of the law no "flesh shall be justified in the sight of God;" and there no longer appears to be any thing absurd, or peculiarly difficult in this part of the apostolical doctrine. That question becomes important to us, which perhaps we once deemed insignificant or speculative, "How shall man be just before God?" We enquire with increasing solicitude, "What must we do to be "saved?" And we are prepared to welcome information, on the method in which the perfect justice and holiness of God can consist with his abundant mercy, in pardoning and saving transgressors; without excepting even those who have committed the most numerous and heinous offences. Thus the peculiar doctrines of the blessed gospel of God our Saviour come regularly under consideration; and open to our view, in their nature, glory, and value, in proportion as we judge ourselves by the holy commandment, and anxiously seek deliverance from the wrath to come.

It is very affecting to the serious mind to reflect on the supercilious disdain, with which men in general treat such enquiries, and those who are engaged in them. The natural philosopher, with an air of self-importance, considers his experiments on the properties of material substances, as an employment of superior excellency: and after having spent many months

in most exact and minute investigations, he will smile, with mingled pity and contempt, at the folly of his neighbour; who hath occupied a few weeks in studying the way of eternal salvation! Metaphysicians frequently deride all those, as discarding the use of their reason, who decide such questions according to the sure testimony of God! Cold formalists obviate all enquiry by saying that 'a good life is every thing in 'religion:' and even men of business and pleasure suspend their eager pursuits to join in ridiculing those humble penitents who seriously attend to this important concern! Yet surely it is most reasonable for a condemned criminal to enquire in the first place, how he may obtain a pardon: and who can doubt, but that person will be most secure from the danger of a fatal mistake, who learns the way of approach and success from the Sovereign himself?

These subjects directly make way for the right understanding of evangelical truth: the man, whose views have been described, will perceive that the gospel exactly suits his case, and is worthy of his most cordial reception. He will not object to the truths of Christianity, because mysterious; nor despise them, under pretence of attending exclusively to practice; nor abuse the mercy of God, as an encouragement to sin: he will perceive the connexion and harmony of evangelical doctrines with the whole system of revelation; and will seek the promised blessings in the appointed way: repentance and works meet for repentance will connect with the life of faith in the Son of God; while his faith will work by love, and love sweetly constrain him to live to the glory of him, who died for him, and rose

again." These truths will be the nutriment of his faith and hope; he will meditate on them from day to day; thence he will derive all his strength, motives, and encouragement for obedience: nor would his knowledge of the rule of duty suffice even for practical purposes, were he not influenced by the principles of the gospel. I proceed therefore,

II. To explain and illustrate the exhortation itself, and suggest the most effectual methods of reducing it to practice.

These things must be in *our own hearts*, before we can to any good purpose teach them to others, or make them the subject of our frequent conversation. We should therefore apply ourselves, with persevering assiduity, to obtain a comprehensive and familiar acquaintance with the doctrines of revelation, in all respects. Our memories should be stored with the precepts, examples, warnings, and promises of the Bible. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." This cannot be done, unless we carefully attend to our Lord's exhortation. "Search the Scriptures; for in them "ye think ye have eternal life." "The hand of the "diligent maketh rich:" and he, "whose delight is in "the law of the Lord, and who meditates in his law "day and night, shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of waters, that bringeth forth his fruit in his "season: his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever "he doeth shall prosper." This man shall be blessed, and shall be a blessing to others.

Labour then, my brethren, to get thoroughly acquainted with the oracles of God: let your judgment be formed according to them: proportion your appro-

bation of characters and actions by this divine standard. In this manner judge of your acquaintance, connexions, and friends; and above all, judge thus of yourselves. Try by this rule every pursuit, attainment, or distinction among men: let your fears, hopes, desires, joys, and sorrows, be regulated according to it; that all the affections of your souls may be influenced by the pure and animating principles of our holy religion. Thus, when fatigued with business or disgusted with the world, you will have a never-failing source of refreshment, and a most salutary relaxation, to invigorate your weary powers, and recruit your exhausted spirits.

When the word of God is thus treasured up and engrafted in our hearts, we shall be disposed and qualified to teach his truths and precepts to our relations, to speak of them among our friends, and to diffuse the knowledge of them in the circle of our acquaintance. This is strenuously enforced by the exhortation of our text. "Thou shalt teach them diligently to thy "children; and thou shalt talk of them when thou sit-"test in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, "and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." In reducing these rules to practice, much depends on external circumstances. When the Christian possesses wealth, or influence, and hath extensive connexions, he ought to attempt great things: while a little may be done in a more obscure situation, by edifying discourse, letters, or the distribution of books: provided opportunities be sought after and diligently improved. We allow, indeed, that conceited disputatious talkers, whose conduct does not consist with their principles,

or who grosly violate the properties of relative life, are often a disgrace to religion: but when divine truth occupies the heart and influences the conduct, a man's ordinary conversation may be rendered very useful, in diffusing religious knowledge, and making others wise unto salvation.

They, however, who are placed at the head of families, should deem themselves peculiarly called upon to teach their children and servants. The examples of scripture are in this respect very encouraging and instructive.—The Lord had given promises of special blessings to the posterity of Abraham, and he was made a principal instrument in preparing the way for their accomplishment. "I know him," saith God, "that he will command his children and his household "after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord "to do judgment and justice, *that* the Lord may bring "upon Abraham the thing that he hath spoken to him "of."* "As for me, and my house," says pious Joshua, "we will serve the Lord." Cornelius the centurion, who "feared God with all his house," and who had pious domesticks, and even soldiers around him, (though doubtless most of them had been educated pagans,) may be considered as a remarkable instance of the blessing attending this kind of religious instruction: while the awful doom of Eli and his family, may serve as a salutary caution to all who are in this respect, tempted to indolence or timidity.

* Gen. xviii, 19.

The ancient method of rendering the truths and precepts of religion familiar to the minds of men, especially of children and servants, is described in the text: "Thou shalt talk of them when thou sitt · in "thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and "when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." And why should the same method be less effectual at present, if it were properly employed? Did we daily instruct our households, by reading and explaining the scriptures to them, along with family-worship; and then frequently converse with seriousness on edifying subjects; did we take occasion from common occurrences, to direct the attention of those around us to the over-ruling providence of God, the fatal effects of sin, the lamentable evidences of human depravity, and the suitableness of the gospel to the state of the world; and did we joyfully embrace every opportunity of inculcating right principles, rectifying mistakes, and making pertinent remarks: young people would be more generally preserved from scepticism, and a considerable barrier would be placed to the incursions of infidelity and impiety. Our Lord himself hath taught us this way of improving conversation, in the most simple and easy manner imaginable: he deduced profitable instructions from every occurrence; and grafted the most important admonitions, even on the insidious questions and impertinent objections of his enemies. We cannot indeed expect to speak with his consummate prudence and irresistible energy: yet we should remember that in this, as in all other things, "he hath left us an example that we should follow his steps;" and promised to give his disciples "a mouth and

"wisdom, which all their enemies shall not be able "to resist."

We are also taught in scripture to encourage young persons in asking questions on religious subjects, by giving them plain and satisfactory answers: and some institutions seem to have been chiefly intended to give occasion for such enquiries*. "The Lord established "a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law which "he commanded our fathers; that they should make "them known unto their children; that the generation "to come might know them, even the children that "should be born, who should arise and declare them "to their children, that they might set their hope in "God†."

The neglect of this duty is a very dark sign of the present times. Children in general are trained up amidst those very vanities, which they who presented them for baptism solemnly vowed they should renounce! They are early initiated into the corrupt maxims and fashions of this evil world, and brought to join in its frivolous and facinating pleasures; and instead of being cautioned against the dangers of conformity to it, are taught to fear nothing so much as the least appearance of singularity! Nay, those persons, who profess a serious regard to religion, often act as if they were anxious to give their children a relish for those seducing trifles, from which they themselves appear to be weaned; and afraid least they should too early choose the good part that can never be taken from them! It is inexpressible how much

* Exod. xii, 36, 37. xiii, 10—14 Josh. iv, 21, 22.
† Ps. lxxviii, 3—8.

these things promote ungodliness and prevent the permanent success of the gospel. But let us, my brethren, aim "to bring up our children in the nurture and "admonition of the Lord;" hoping and longing that they may be "a chosen generation, a royal priest-"hood," a holy and peculiar people, by whom true religion may be supported after our decease, and transmitted to future ages. In this view we may consider them as real blessings: but in what other light can a pious parent behold his beloved offspring without the most painful reflexions?

We ought not, however, to confine our efforts within the limits of our own families, but should endeavour to propagate our religious principles in the world. What reason indeed can we have to be ashamed of them? Or how can we timidly conceal them, without being ashamed of Christ and his words? We live, it is true, among men called Christians: yet it is almost deemed an outrage on good manners, to speak seriously of the doctrine and salvation of our Lord and master! Shall we then hold our peace, and sanction the conduct of a lukewarm or apostate generation by our example? God forbid! We are commanded to bind the great truths and precepts of his word, "as a sign upon our hands, and "as frontlets between our eyes; and to write them on "the posts of our houses, and on our gates." This can imply nothing less than an open profession that we are the worshippers of God, and the disciples of Christ; that we believe the Scriptures, embrace the gospel, and make the commandments of the Lord the rule of our conduct. These things should be

clearly understood by our friends and connexions, that when they enter our houses they may say, 'God is worshipped in this family;' that they may be restrained from evil in our presence by the consideration of our character and profession, and be prepared to hear from us such pious reflections as may occur in the course of conversation.

We shall rejoice at the last day to have our faith and piety made known before the assembled world; what then can induce us to conceal them at present, but fear of ridicule or reproach? We should recollect that an intrepid profession of the truth, without ambiguity or prevarication, is expressly required by the Lord Jesus from all his disciples; that this is one grand mean of promoting his cause in the world; that the scorn to which it may expose us, is a clear demonstration of the great contempt, in which the divine Saviour is held, even among his professed disciples; and that this is evidently a cross to be born for his sake, "who bare our sins in his own body on the "tree." Let us then,

III. Consider the reasonableness of such a conduct.

Should a liberal and honoured benefactor earnestly demand our attention to a message he had sent us; we should doubtless examine it with studious accuracy, and explicitly comply with his desires. Should a friend bequeath us a legacy, we should not be wanting in examining the favourable clause of his testament, and availing ourselves to the utmost of his kind remembrance. But the message of God, in all respects, is far more entitled to our strictest regard. He who made us, and against whom we all have sinned, con-

descends to teach us how we may escape eternal misery and obtain eternal happiness! Is it not then most reasonable, that we should diligently observe his instructions, and recommend them with our whole influence? The world is against us; the broad road to destruction is thronged; false religion unites with impiety in rendering our situation most perilous; God himself condescends to guide us in the safe and happy path; and shall we reject his counsels? Our own hearts are deceitful, the powers of darkness unwearied in their subtle efforts to delude us: and shall we not use every means of escaping their wiles, and warning others to elude their devices? New forms of delusion start up every day: shall we not then bestow pains to distinguish the truths of revelation from damnable heresies? Surely it is most reasonable, both to study the Scriptures, and to pray without ceasing for the teaching of the holy Spirit; that we may be kept from the ways of the destroyer, established in the pure principles of Christianity, preserved from innumerable dangers, find unfailing resources of support and comfort in trying circumstances, be rendered useful in our respective stations, meet death with joyful hope, and leave the world in full assurance of everlasting felicity.

The knowledge and wisdom, which may be derived from a careful investigation of the Scriptures, will be found of the utmost importance, even in conducting our temporal concerns. We shall thus learn the best discretion in estimating characters, and judging of men's pretensions and professions: be directed how to act even in respect of their prejudices and

mistakes; and learn to accommodate ourselves to varying circumstances, without countenancing evil by improper compliances, or preventing our own success by violent opposition, where gentleness might have obviated the difficulty.

But the subject is too copious to be fully discussed on this occasion. It must suffice to observe, that the advantages of diligence and earnestness, in the grand concerns of our holy religion, far more than counterbalance the self-denial that it requires. For what is it, but bestowing pains to be happy and useful? to live and die in comfort? and to use proper means of rendering our children and relatives happy? that they too may serve their generation according to the will of God, leave the world with joyful hope, and meet with us in heaven. And are not these objects well deserving of our utmost diligence and unwearied attention?

Let me then conclude with the observation which introduced the subject: 'If religion be any thing, it 'is every thing.' It must be our business in this world, if we would enjoy a warranted hope of felicity in the world to come: yea, it must be our element here, in order to a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. Every man's own conscience must decide, how far this is his character and experience; and every one must be left to apply the subject to his own case, for conviction, admonition, or encouragement. And may the Lord himself enable us to attend to these things, according to their immense and eternal importance; and teach us so to "number our days, "that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."—Amen.

SERMON III.

ISAIAH, vi, 5—8.

Then said I, woe is me! for I am undone: because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.—Then flew one of the Seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, here am I, send me.

WHEN Isaiah had already been employed a considerable time in the prophetical office, he was greatly disconcerted by a remarkable vision, which he records in the chapter before us.—We ought not to imagine that things outwardly exist, as they appeared to the minds of the prophets, when their senses were closed during the visions of the Almighty; but that they were impressed with such representations, as were suitable to convey the intended instruction. The scene of these emblematick discoveries was laid at the temple; every intervening veil was apparently re-

moved; the most holy place was made manifest; and JEHOVAH was seen in glory above the mercy-seat, as on "a throne high and lifted up, and his train," (or the skirts of his robes) "filled the temple." This description evidently leads the mind to the idea of one in human form; and St. John instructs us, that the prophet at this time saw "the glory of Christ and spake of him*." For indeed the glory of God is especially made known, not only to the church on earth, but also to the hosts in heaven, by the person and redemption of Emmanuel†.

Above the other worshippers, and nearest to the throne, stood the Seraphim, the most exalted of the angelick host, who glow with love and zeal like a flame of fire‡. These, in other respects appearing in human form, had each six wings; "with two of which they covered their faces," in token of the profound reverence with which they contemplated the majesty of the Lord, before whose uncreated glories their derived excellencies were eclipsed, and disappeared: with two of them they covered their feet, as conscious that their services, though perfectly undefiled with sin, were not worthy to be noticed by the infinite and eternal God: and with their other two wings they did fly; an emblem of the celerity, alacrity, and delight, with which they execute the mandates of their Creator. At the same time they sang aloud in responsive strains, "Holy, holy, holy is the "Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory."

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* John xii, 41. † 2 Cor. iv, 6. Eph. iii, 10. 1 Pet. i, 12.
‡ Ps. civ, 4.

Entirely filled with admiration of the divine majesty and holiness; they had no leisure to reflect with complacency on their own endowments, or to panegyrize one another. Such employments they leave to us poor sinful mortals, who, amidst the obscurity of our fallen state, unaccustomed to contemplate any thing more splendid than the accomplishments of our fellow-sinners, are apt to shine in our own eyes, or in those of each other, like glow worms during the darkness of the night. But these bright seraphs, satisfied with the love of God, desire no other commendation; and are wholly taken up in adoring the glorious holiness of JEHOVAH.

The threefold ascription of holiness to the Lord of hosts has generally been considered as an intimation of a Trinity of persons in the Godhead, and a reference to the glory of the Father, the Son, and the holy Ghost, displayed in the salvation of sinners.* While this song of praise was re-echoed, by the seraphim, the pillars shook at every response; and smoke, or darkness, filled the whole temple, as when it was first dedicated by Solomon. The effect which this awful scene had upon the mind of the prophet, is described in the words of the text, and the interesting passage may suggest the following subjects for our consideration—

I. The causes of the prophet's distress and alarm.

II. The peculiar nature and tendency of it.

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* Matt. xxviii, 18—20. Rev. iv, 8.

III. The relief and encouragement which he received: and

IV. The effects produced in his disposition and conduct.

I. The causes of the prophet's distress and alarm.

It appears at the first glance, that Isaiah was greatly disconcerted and humbled by the scene which he had been contemplating. Indeed suitable views of the divine majesty and glory always produce proportionable humility; and by this touch-stone, spiritual illumination may be distinguished from that "which knowledge puffeth up." When Job, to whose eminent piety the Lord himself had born decided testimony, had been so carried away in the warmth of controversy, as to use irreverent language concerning the dispensations of Providence; he was convinced of his presumption, and awed into submission by discoveries of the divine majesty; and exclaimed, "Behold I am vile, what shall "I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. "Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, "twice, but I will proceed no further." And again, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but "now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor my-"self, and repent in dust and ashes." He seemed to himself of some consequence, while disputing with his friends, and vindicating himself from their unjust charge of hypocrisy: but when JEHOVAH spake to him from the whirlwind, he shrunk as it were into nothing, and his self-importance was changed into self-abhorrence. In like manner, when Peter saw a little of the Saviour's power and authority, in the

draught of fishes, which had been brought to his net, he fell down at his feet, and said, "Depart from me, "for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

But while discoveries of the majesty of God will awe the soul into self-abasement, the knowledge of his moral excellencies is the immediate cause of those humiliating convictions, by which sinners are rendered truly penitent, and induced to welcome the salvation of the gospel. And the prophet seems to have been especially affected by that view of the glory and beauty of JEHOVAH, which was the principal subject of adoring praises to the Seraphim before the throne. While men think little of our holy God, mistake his character, or continue in great measure unacquainted with his commandments and judgments; they compare themselves with their associates in disobedience, and estimate their conduct by some defective standard. Thus enveloped in darkness, they judge favourably of themselves, imagine they possess various excellencies, and even pretend to *merit* in the sight of God! Nor is this the case only of the moral and virtuous, for self-love will furnish the most criminal with some palliation of their vices; they will call them by a soft name, imagine others more faulty than themselves, and endeavour to compensate for undeniable and inexcusable transgression, by some pretended good actions or qualities!

But when the Lord directs the sinner's attention to the scriptures, and makes known to him in some degree his own glorious holiness; deep conviction of sin is the infallible consequence, every plea is silenced,

and the trembling criminal is even ready to conclude himself lost beyond hope of recovery.

This fully accounts for that change, which often takes place, in the opinion that moral and amiable persons entertain of themselves, when they seriously study the holy scriptures. Their decent lives, on which they formerly reflected with abundant self-complacency, are now mentioned in very degrading language; and even their present strict and exemplary conduct is accompanied with very humble confessions of guilt and defilement. This excites the astonishment of those who judge by other rules; and they are apt to suspect, either that such persons have secretly practised very gross enormities, or that they use this language from a mere affectation of humility. But in reality the same characters and actions must appear good or bad, according to the rule or standard with which they are compared: no wonder therefore, that they who have lately become acquainted with a holy God and his perfect law, and who have learned to judge by another standard, are compelled to bring in a verdict against themselves, though before they trusted that they were righteous and despised others. Thus St. Paul "was alive without the law once; but "when the commandment came, sin revived, and he "died." He had entertained very favourable thoughts of his own moral and religious character; but when his understanding was opened to "behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," he condemned himself as the chief of sinners! nay, after all his labours and proficiency in Christianity, he was in his own esteem "less than the least of all saints!"

But these things were also illustrated to the prophet by the worship and services, which the Seraphim presented before the Lord of hosts. The holy angels "excel in strength," and are glorious beyond the conception of mortal men: so that the most eminent saints have been dismayed even at their benign appearance, or tempted to render them divine honours. Yet these exalted spirits appeared in vision, as engaged in adoration of the great JEHOVAH; uniting deep humility with the most exalted praises; and manifesting the fullest conviction, that their spotless services were inexpressibly beneath the excellency and greatness of that God whom they worshipped. This view seems to have greatly conduced to throw the prophet's mind into that perturbation which he discovered on the occasion.

Men in general keep each other in countenance, while they rest satisfied with a form of godliness. They go to a place of worship, and to the Lord's table; read or repeat a prayer and a thanksgiving; and please themselves with the idea that they have *done their duty:* nay, they have scarcely an idea of a more spiritual worship! But when their attention is directed to the devout aspirations of David, Daniel, and other holy men of God; especially when they contemplate the adorations of the heavenly hosts, as described in the sacred Scriptures; they become sensible by the comparison, that they have been, heedlessly or presumptuously, presenting to the glorious JEHOVAH a formal, defiled, and hypocritical service, "drawing "near to him with their lips, while their hearts were "far from him." But this very properly leads us,

II. To consider the peculiar nature and tendency of that inward perturbation, which caused this eminent servant of God to exclaim, "Woe is me, for I am "undone."

Isaiah was called when young to the prophetical office; and we may thence conclude that he had been preserved by divine grace from every evil way, and had dedicated his earliest days to the service of God. He discharged the sacred trust confided to him for about sixty years; yet we do not find, during this long period, that he ever acted inconsistently with his sacred ministry. In his private deportment and publick work, he seems to have sustained a most unexceptionable character; nor have we any proofs of his sinfulness but those found in his own confessions. Yet, on this occasion, he was so overwhelmed with the sense of his own guilt and pollution, that he was almost ready to lie down in despair! Some indeed render his words thus: "Woe is me, I am *struck dumb*," 'He 'was struck dumb,' says bishop Lowth, 'because he 'was a man of polluted lips, and dwelt among a peo-'ple of polluted lips; and was unworthy either to join 'the Seraphim in singing God's praises, or to be the 'messenger of God to his people.' And indeed, "every mouth shall be stopped, and all the world be-"come guilty before God." It is however, evident that he was so alarmed and humbled, because "his "eyes had seen the King the Lord of hosts," that "his "mouth was stopped, he became guilty before God," and he feared lest his religious services and prophetical labours should increase his condemnation. Yet this did not arise from the recollection of immoralities

or impieties, or from conscious hypocrisy or unfaithfulness in his ministry: but from the conviction of his mind, that his best duties were exceedingly polluted; whether he considered the holy majesty of the Lord to whom they were presented, or compared them with the exalted worship of the heavenly hosts. He would no doubt reflect, with shame and sorrow, on his want of reverence and humility in his religious performances; on the wandering imaginations which distracted his attention; and on his want of zeal, love, and admiring gratitude, even in his most fervent praises and thanksgivings. He might also, perhaps be conscious of a corrupt self-complacency and regard to the opinion of men, mingling even with his endeavours to glorify God; and that he had felt but little delight in those employments, which angels deem their highest privilege, and in which they enjoy unalloyed felicity.

As the prophet of the Lord, he had likewise delivered many awful messages to the rebellious Jews: but this vision made him afraid, lest he too should fall under condemnation, for executing so important an office from corrupt motives, with a divided heart, and in an improper manner.

He was at the same time convinced, that he "dwelt "among a people of polluted lips." The Israelites were distinguished from other nations, as the worshippers of JEHOVAH; and when the prophet compared himself with them, he supposed that his services were pure and spiritual. But he now perceived that he ought not to be thus satisfied; for when their religious duties and professions were brought forth

to the light, and viewed in connexion with the adoration of the Seraphim, it was manifest that God might justly reject them with abhorrence. It was therefore more proper for him to imitate the leper, who covered his lip, and cried, "Unclean! unclean!"

These observations illustrate the apostle's declaration that "there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Great diversity is indeed found in the moral conduct of men; and the Judge of the world will proportion the punishment of the wicked to the number and aggravation of their crimes: but in this respect there is no difference, "for all have sinned." The most virtuous and religious, even they who have served the Lord from their earliest days in genuine piety, must fall down before him in deep humility; and not only confess that they have been guilty of numerous omissions, and deviations from the rule of duty, in thought, word, and deed; but that their very services have often been the fruit of polluted lips. Nor could they ever have been satisfied with them, had they not dwelt among sinners like themselves, and had not their views of that glorious God whom they professed to worship been faint and confused.

Let any man carefully and impartially examine his own devotions, in the closet, in the house of God, or at the Lord's table: let him close every duty, or every Sabbath, with endeavours to ascertain the degree of spiritual worship, and of a corrupt mixture, which the all-seeing eye of a holy God must have witnessed in his performances; and I dare confidently to foretel, that he will ere long cry out with the prophet, "We are all as an unclean thing, and

" all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags:" or in the language of the *judicious* Hooker, 'The best things 'that we do have something in them to be pardoned: 'how then can we do any thing meritorious or wor- 'thy to be rewarded? Our continual suit to the Lord 'is and must be, to bear with our infirmities, and par- 'don our offences.' Thus "the Scripture concludes "all under sin; that the promise which is by Christ "Jesus might be given to them that believe*!" For these are discoveries of sinfulness, from which no man can escape, when he weighs himself in the balance of the sanctuary: so that every one is left to his choice, either to condemn the spirituality of the law and the holiness of the Lawgiver; or to submit to the righteousness of God, and to cry for mercy, saying, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in "thy sight shall no man living be justified."

This humiliation cannot be too deep; we cannot be too sensible of our guilt and pollution, or too entirely delivered from self-confidence. But we may easily be too much *discouraged*, and through despondency neglect the means of grace, and the duties of our station. Many persons, having discovered with great alarm their guilt and danger, and being convinced, by painful experience, of their inability to resist temptation, or to keep their resolutions, have rushed impetuously into wickedness, impiety, or infidelity, to obtain deliverance from the reproaches of their own consciences: and probably but few are duly humbled, without passing through a measure of discouraging terrors. Even the prophet was on this oc-

* Col. iii, 22.

casion dismayed, as well as laid low in self-abasement; and if seasonable encouragement had not been afforded, the very intention of the vision would have been counteracted, and he unfitted for the arduous services to which he was called.

III. Then we consider the relief and encouragement which he received.

We are not indeed warranted to expect direct assurances by immediate revelation; yet the emblems of this vision aptly represent the way in which the convinced sinner finds peace and hope, connected with increasing humiliation.—It has been remarked, that the scene of this vision was the temple: the altar of burnt-offering was therefore full in view, on which the daily sacrifices and occasional oblations were consuming, by the fire that came down from heaven. The blood of numberless innocent animals slain in sacrifice, and their bodies consumed to ashes, that guilty men might be pardoned and blessed, were constant declarations that sinners deserved death, and the fiery wrath of God in another world; and that deliverance could only be obtained by faith in the promised Redeemer, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of "the world." From this altar one of the Seraphim took a live coal, and applied it to the prophet's lips, assuring him that his "iniquity was taken away, and "his sin purged."

No endeavours were used to comfort Isaiah by persuading him, that he thought too ill of his own character and services: no intimation was made, that the vision had bewildered his mind, and inspired groundless alarms. On the contrary, the heavenly messenger

of peace seemed to allow that "he was a man of polluted lips," and that his present judgment of himself was according to truth: but he assured him, that his guilt was removed by the atoning sacrifices, and by faith in the typified Redeemer. When Simon the Pharisee disdained the weeping penitent, who washed the Saviour's feet with her tears, our Lord did not vindicate her character or palliate her guilt; but graciously noticing her repentance, faith, and love, he declared, that, "her sins though many were forgiven." This is the uniform method of scripture: but numbers endeavour to encourage trembling sinners, by arguing them into a more favourable opinion of themselves, or by pointing out certain good actions or qualities, which may counterbalance their offences. Such are physicians of no value. They administer fatal opiates to the lethargick, when they have been in a measure awakened: and they prolong the distress of the contrite and poor in spirit. No man is terrified merely by the opinion that his sins are numerous and heinous; but through unbelief, ignorance, or indistinct notions of the divine mercy, and of the blessed gospel of God our Saviour. These are therefore the subjects, on which we should principally insist, if we would bring the distressed in conscience to permanent comfort and stable peace. "Faith comes by hearing:" and while we point out "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the "world," we do our part to apply "the live coal "from the altar" to the trembling sinner's lips. For when a man is brought to seek encouragement, not from himself or any of his services, but from the infinite mercies of God, through the atoning blood of

Christ; and to perceive the Saviour's power and willingness "to save unto the uttermost all that come to God through him;" he will soon rise superior to his desponding fears, and possess "a good hope through grace," that his "sins though many are forgiven;" or at least, that his iniquity will at length be purged away.

But whoever may be the messenger of peace to the broken in heart, the Holy Spirit is the Author and Giver of this blessing. "When the Comforter is come," saith the Lord Jesus, "he shall convince the world of sin:" and "He shall glorify me; for he shall receive "of mine and shew it unto you."* When humiliating convictions have prepared the heart to welcome a free salvation, the divine Comforter enables the sinner to see the glory of God, and the harmony of his attributes, in the person and redemption of Christ: thus he finds peace and joy in believing, and at length "abounds in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost!" This consolation is the effect of regenerating grace, and accompanied by a new creation of the soul to holiness. The faith that justifies is living and active: it works by love of God and man; purifies the heart, and overcomes the world; and thus renders the believer fruitful in good works, to the glory of God through Jesus Christ. The live coal from the altar may therefore be considered as an emblem of those spiritual affections, that are kindled in the believer's heart by the Holy Spirit, which prepare, animate, and even con-

* John, xvi. 8.—15.

"him, and gave himself for him;" zeal for his glory, and compassion for perishing sinners, combined in rendering him superior to all other hopes and fears, and prepared him for most unwearied exertions and patient sufferings, in making full proof of his sacred ministry.

We allow that the subject applies with peculiar propriety to the case of those who are engaged in the same good work: but all Christains "are bought "with a price, that they may glorify God with their "bodies and spirits which are his." They all love the Lord Jesus Christ on the same grounds, though not in equal measure; they partake of "like precious faith" with that of the apostles; and "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." When therefore the deeply humbled sinner has been delivered from gloomy fears of deserved wrath, and enabled to rejoice in Christ and his pardoning love: he will certainly enquire, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?" Nor will he, when under the lively impressions of admiring love and gratitude, be disposed to think any sacrifice too costly, any labour too great, or any danger too imminent, to which he may be called, in his attempts to serve and honour his beloved Benefactor. This leads him to consider, in what way he may most effectually recommend the salvation of Christ to his fellow-sinners, or be useful to that "flock which he purchased with his own "blood." These reflections will frequently employ his thoughts, whether he be a minister of religion, a magistrate, a steward of the unrighteous mammon, possessed of influence, or endued with natural and

acquired abilities; or whether, on the contrary, he live in a private and obscure station,—a labourer, a servant, in deep poverty, or even in a state of slavery. And whatever be the Christian's outward situation and circumstances, provided he aim to serve the Lord Jesus by a conscientious attention to his peculiar duties, in honesty, quietness, and contentment: he will be enabled to "adorn the doctrine of God his Sa-"viour," and as certainly meet with a gracious acceptance, as if we were sent, like Isaiah and Paul, to carry his message to the church and to the world.

The performance of relative duties, even when the most unkind returns are experienced; strict integrity under heavy losses and in trying circumstances; patience and meekness amidst sufferings and injuries; are in some respects equivalent to the prophets alacrity in undertaking the painful service allotted him. And, in proportion as the believer can unite deep humility with assured hope and fervent zeal, he will act with decision according to the commands of his Lord, and the opportunities or advantages afforded him. But if pride warp his steady aim and mar his simplicity, or negligence make way for guilt and alarm; he will find himself in all respects indisposed for difficult, perilous, or self-denying services. When discouragement prevails, "the hands hang down and the knees "wax feeble:" a man in this case scarcely finds himself at liberty to speak a word on religious subjects, for the instruction even of his own family; and still less to attempt any thing of a more arduous nature, for the glory of God and the benefit of his church. When David had been grievously overcome by temp-

tations, he found that conscious guilt rendered him incapable of renewing his bold and zealous endeavours in the service of God. He therefore prayed, "Open my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may shew "forth thy praise." But when the joy of God's salvation is restored, the lively exercise of every holy affection renders a man ready to say, "Here I am, "send me:" 'If so poor a worm as I am, may glo-'rify thy name, O Lord, I would thankfully yield 'myself to thy disposal, that I may be employed in 'any way, which may seem good in thy sight.'

If then these be indeed the effects of such humbling and encouraging views of the Lord and heavenly things, as have been described; we ought certainly to enquire with great seriousness, whether we have learned or experienced any thing of the same nature?—And this may introduce an address to different descriptions of persons.

There are numbers, who do not wish to be thought infidels or irreligious; but call themselves believers, render some worship to God, and respect the name of Christ and the leading truths of Christianity: yet they by no means think that they are altogether sinful, and exposed to just condemnation even for the defilements of their religious duties. They adopt various methods of eluding the inferences we draw from the general declarations of scripture, concerning the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart; and object to every attempt made to convince them, that they themselves, as well as Gentiles and wicked Jews, are included in these unrestricted charges. These appear to them hard sayings; because they

deprive them of every plea, undermine the foundation of their hope, and exclude all boasting and self-preference. But, if you have been used to reason and object in this manner, let me earnestly intreat and conjure you, seriously to answer the following questions: Do you really think your own hearts, characters, and services to be more holy and excellent, than those of Job, Isaiah, Daniel, or Paul? Or do you suppose that your superior sanctity is proportioned to the difference of the language you use in speaking of your virtues and duties? If you cannot without affectation adopt their humiliating expressions, it must arise from one of these causes: either your conduct or character are far more holy than their's were; or they knew far more of God and of themselves, than you do. You are either much better men; or you are much less acquainted with those things, which are essential to a right judgment of characters and actions.

When the apostle said, "*That* God, who commanded "ed the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined "in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge "of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;" he assigned the real cause of the lowly opinion, which eminent saints have ever entertained of themselves: and a want of this divine illumination gives occasion for that favourable estimate which numbers form of their virtues and characters. If then this be the case, or if there be the least probability that it is so; would it not be wise in you, my friends, to intreat the Lord that he would "open your understandings to under-"stand the scriptures?" and would it be improper for you, frequently to meditate with fixed attention on

the glorious perfections and holy commandments of God? Let me affectionately beseech you to compare your duties with the standard of holy writ; to watch your own hearts, while engaged in them; and to examine impartially your motives in those services, to which you annex some confused idea of merit, and that you hope will make amends, in part at least, for the undeniable defects of your character. A day approacheth, in which every eye shall behold a far more glorious scene than that which overwhelmed the mind of the prophet Isaiah. The divine Saviour will appear "in his own glory, and in the glory of the "Father, with all his holy angels." Then every action will be weighed in an impartial balance; every character fully made known; and every unpardoned transgressor struck dumb in the presence of his Judge, or only able to say, "Woe is me, I am undone!" while the awful words, "Depart ye cursed into ever-"lasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," shall fill him with terror and sink him into despair. But at present there is hope: and those discoveries of guilt which tend to humble us, and prepare us for welcoming the salvation of God, should be considered as inestimable mercies, the forerunners of "joy un-"speakable and full of glory."

But perhaps these subjects have rendered you uneasy and dejected; and you have on that account deemed it best to divert your attention from them, and at any rate to keep on good terms with your own consciences. You therefore neglect the scriptures, and such books, company, or preaching, as formerly disquieted you; and, hearkening to worldly counsellors,

seek relief from diversions, indulgences, or a hurry of business; or perhaps try to dispel melancholy by a cheerful glass. Thus numbers close their eyes against the light, because they hate it, till the Lord gives them up to judicial blindness!

My beloved fellow sinners, as you value your immortal souls, do not yield to such temptations. Do not shrink from the discovery of your real character and condition, while hope remains. The knowledge of the disease is the first step towards recovery: but a groundless imagination that there is no danger, is the common prelude to an incurable prevalence of the malady. As reasonable agents, examine this matter with an accuracy and impartiality proportioned to its importance: that in case your confidence of safety should be found a mere presumption, you may now seek and obtain that inward satisfaction which the prophet felt, when assured that "his iniquity was taken "away, and his sin purged." Can you doubt, whether it be better to discover your danger now, or to remain strangers to it, till God shall call you to receive your eternal retribution?

But are any of you so deeply convinced of sin, as to be ready to say, "Woe is me, I am undone!" Let me caution you, my brethren, against despondency. The wreck and ruin of self-confidence makes way for evangelical hope. The Son of God came into the world to save sinners, to seek that which was lost, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, to reconcile enemies by the blood of his cross, to receive gifts for the rebellious, to justify the ungodly, to sanctify the unholy: to give life to the dead, strength to

the helpless, liberty to the captive, and felicity to the wretched. He invites all who are athirst, yea, all that are willing, to come and buy of him the blessings of salvation, without money and without price. "Him "that cometh unto me," saith the Saviour, "I will "in no wise case out." "Behold then the Lamb of "God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" He is "the Author and Finisher of faith;" and he hath pointed out to you the proper way of seeking peace and salvation, in these most instructive and encouraging words; "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and "you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto "you: for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that "seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall "be opened*."

But some hearers of the gospel are sufficiently confident that their sins are forgiven, and that they have experienced that change which is described in the scripture: yet they are not disposed to say, "Here I am, Lord, send me." They shew no zeal for the honour of God; no readiness for self-denying services, no tokens of being constrained by the love of Christ to live as his devoted servants. It does not appear that their terrors were accompanied by humiliation and hatred of sin, or their comforts by the sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience. But let us all beware of this delusion; "for every tree that bringeth "not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into "the fire."

* Matt. vii, 7, 8.

Finally, my Christian brethren, I beseech you by the mercies of God, to desire an increase of that spiritual knowledge which produces humility; but at the same time to watch against discouraging fears, while conscious of integrity in your professed faith and love, and your desire to honour the Lord by thankful obedience. For, these indulged and needless apprehensions render the mind too feeble for active service or patient suffering; and they give religion a forbidding and unamiable aspect. Let us therefore unite all our contemplations on other subjects, with frequent meditations on the mercy and grace of God our Saviour; be very careful not to grieve the Holy Spirit by evil tempers or a selfish behaviour; and be diligent in every means of grace. Above all, let us pray without ceasing for such a sweet sense of the Lord's pardoning mercy and abundant grace, as may animate all our endeavours to shew the holy tendency of our principles, and to make those "ashamed who would "falsely accuse our good conversation in Christ."

SERMON IV.

1 JOHN, iv, 8.

GOD IS LOVE.

THE sacred writers do not enforce practical religion, by such inducements as are commonly suggested by moralists and philosophers. The beauty of virtue, its utility to mankind, and its benign effects on the health, peace, interest, and reputation of the possessor, may be mentioned with propriety as subordinate recommendations: but the authority, command, example, and glory of God, constitute the primary motives and ultimate object of genuine holiness; and every duty is inculcated in the New Testament, by the encouragements and obligations of the gospel. "Beloved," says the aged apostle, "let us love one another, for "love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of "God, and knoweth God; he that loveth not knoweth "not God: for GOD IS LOVE.—In this was manifest-"ed the love of God towards us; because that God

"sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we "might live through him."

Let us then,

I. Enquire how such compendious propositions as this in the text, should be understood.

II. Illustrate the truth and importance of it, from the dealings of God with his creatures, especially with mankind.

III. Point out certain perverse inferences, which are frequently deduced from it.

IV. And lastly, make some practical use of the subject.

I. In what manner ought we to understand such compendious propositions, as this in the text?

There is a peculiar curse, as it were, connected with indolence and levity in the grand concerns of religion. If a man will trifle in matters of the last importance, and if, instead of carefully examining the meaning of an expression, as it stands in the context and forms a part of a consistent revelation, he only attend to the mere sound of the words, allowing his prejudices and passions to interpret them; he will surely be taken in a snare, and perhaps left to wrest the scriptures to his own destruction. The diligent and faithful servant will not only consider a few words of the commands or directions of his master; but he will observe the whole of them, weigh their import, and endeavour fully to understand them. This is the proper use of reason in respect of divine revelation. We are neither authorized nor qualified to sit in judgment on the testimony of God, to reject any part of it as useless or

injurious, to propose alterations, or to make additions. All such attempts are both absurd and presumptuous in the extreme. But our rational powers are the gift of God, to whom we are accountable for our use of them: and as we should soberly examine what ground we have to believe the scriptures to be a divine revelation; so we ought to study them with diligence and teachableness; and depending on the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit, endeavour to find out the real meaning of every proposition contained in them.

We meet with several comprehensive declarations in the sacred oracles; which must always be explained by comparing them with such passages, as more fully state and unfold the doctrines of Christianity. The apostle John, in another place, says that "God is "Light:" James affirms, that "He is the Father of "lights, with whom is no variableness or shadow of "turning:" and Paul declares, that "Our God is "a consuming fire." Now a man would not think of inferring from this last expression, that the Lord cannot exercise mercy, but must punish and destroy all sinners without exception: and this apparent limitation is also implied, when it is said that GOD is LOVE.

"Thus saith the high and lofty One, who inhabit-"eth eternity, whose name is Holy:" if then the Lord's name be *Holy*, he is *holiness*, as certainly as he is *Love*. The same might be shewn in respect of all his perfections; except that Love takes the lead, as it were, in the display which he makes of his glorious character.

We discourse indeed on such subjects like children: we are wholly incapable of conceiving aright of the divine nature: the attributes of the Deity doubtless exist and operate with a simplicity that we cannot explain, and probably there is not that entire distinction between the effects of mercy, justice, truth, and holiness, in the divine nature and conduct, which appears to our contracted minds. Yet it may encourage us, under this our conscious incapacity, to reflect that the Lord himself speaks to us in our own language; as more conducive to our benefit, though less flattering to our pride. Philosophers, it is true, frequently reject the style of scripture, and attempt to prove that there is nothing in the divine nature which can properly be called wrath, indignation, or avenging justice. But, whatever use may be made of these speculations, in teaching us to exclude from our thoughts concerning the infinite God, every idea which originates from the corrupt passions of our fallen nature: it is evident that this is not the best method of addressing mankind; neither the most intelligible, impressive, nor useful: for it is not the style of the only wise God himself. In speaking to us, he has seen good to adopt that kind of language, which is commonly used by the unlearned, that is by an immense majority of the human species.

We must therefore continue to discourse of the divine attributes, as distinct though harmonious: and when we read that "God is Love," we must suppose that a different instruction is intended, than when we are told, that "Our God is a consuming fire." The declaration that the Lord is "a holy and just God,"

has a different meaning from the encouraging assurance, that "He is merciful and gracious, forgiving "iniquity, transgression, and sin." Yet these distinct attributes perfectly harmonize in the divine character, and only *seem* to limit each other: for the Lord is infinite in wisdom, justice, holiness, goodness, mercy, and truth; exactly as if each attribute subsisted alone in his incomprehensible nature.

We must not, however, imagine, when it is said, that God is love, or truth, or vengeance, that these properties are so essential to him, that they cannot but act to the utmost in all possible cases; as fire cannot but burn, whether the effects be useful or destructive; or as water must rush downward, when obstructions are removed, whether it fertilize or deluge the country.— We should remember that he acts with most perfect freedom, and unerring wisdom, "according "to the counsel of his own will." It is therefore impossible that any divine attribute could have been exercised in a greater degree, or in a different manner, than it has been: because the works of the Lord's power, and the effects of his justice and love, have been exactly as many and great, as infinite wisdom determined they should be.

We may perhaps discover a faint illustration of the subject, in the conduct of two affluent persons, both apparently very liberal. The one not duly estimating the real value of riches, or the true ends of generosity, scatters abroad with a lavish hand, till he exhausts the very resources of his bounty; while his indiscriminate liberality often encourages vice, and does more harm than good to society. The other considers his wealth

as an improvable talent: he gives and spends only when he judges it will answer some good purpose; he frequently rejects importunate applications, but on other occasions he is bountiful without waiting to be solicited. He studies to exercise beneficence in consistency with justice, and to retain the ability of permanent usefulness: he aims to render his liberality subservient to the best interests of mankind, and uniformly to discountenance sloth, profligacy, and ungodliness. And thus, while he seems to limit his bounty, he renders it more abundantly and durably useful, by regulating it with prudence and discretion.—In like manner the wisdom and justice of God may appear to restrain the exercise of his love; but they only direct it in that manner, which is most worthy and honourable to his name, and the best interest of his universal and everlasting kingdom.

It may therefore suffice in general to observe, that the Lord acts freely and according to his own perfections, and not by constraint, or reluctantly; that loving kindness is his peculiar honour, which adds lustre to all his other attributes; that he delighteth in goodness and mercy, and rejoiceth in his boundless power of communicating felicity; that he is not in any respect less holy, just, and true, than if he had shewn no mercy; and that it is impossible he should communicate more happiness, upon any other plan; than he actually will communicate in that way which his infinite wisdom hath devised, whatever ignorance or presumption may imagine or assert.

II. Then we proceed to illustrate the truth and importance of the doctrine contained in the text, from

the dealings of God with his creatures, especially with the human race.

This will be rendered very evident, by considering a gradation of events, in which the Lord hath exercised love and mercy, far beyond all that ever could have entered into the heart of man to conceive, had it not been revealed.

Let us then endeavour to realize, as far as such poor worms are able, the infinite and self-existent God, from all eternity possessed of essential glory and felicity, incapable of increase or diminution.

Thus circumstanced, he could have no other possible inducement but love, or a disposition to delight in communicating happiness, in creating the universe, and producing a vast variety of beings, capable of life and enjoyment. The inanimate creation was formed perfectly good, and exactly suited to the use and benefit of living creatures. The numerous orders of these, from the invisible animated atom to the bright Seraph before the throne, were all made complete in their kind, adapted to the place and design of their existence, and capable of a measure of enjoyment: and, except as sin has deranged the original constitution of infinite love, no creature is left destitute of a degree of happiness equal to its capacity. In meditating, however, on this subject, we must recollect, that "the creation groan-"eth and travaileth in pain," through the sins of man: his cruelty and tyranny add immensely to the sufferings of innocent animals, and he is punished in them, as his property and the subjects of his original dominion.

It is also worthy of observation, that no rational

creature has ever been deprived of an adequate felicity, except in the case of transgression; at least we have no intimation of this kind, either in the works or in the word of God. None has been degraded to an inferior situation, rendered uncertain in respect of the future, or distressed by terror, bitterness, or vanity. On the contrary, we have every reason to conclude, that the capacities of all obedient creatures continually expand; that their enjoyment proportionably increases; and that they all will become more and more blessed to all eternity. In these things surely GOD is LOVE!

If the case of infants should be thought an exception, seeing they suffer and die without personal criminality; we may observe, without entering on an intricate controversy, that all who believe the Bible, must allow the human race to have become sinful and mortal by the fall of Adam; and they who reject revelation, will not find less difficulty than others, in accounting for the present condition of mankind.—If then every branch fell, when the root was overthrown; "if we "are born in sin and the children of wrath;" it behoves us to be silent on this subject, and to wait for the clearer light of the great decisive day. For indeed, it is highly probable, that the case of infants will then appear not only consistent with the divine justice, in respect of their present sufferings, but one grand display of the divine mercy and goodness, in the felicity by which those sufferings were succeeded.

The Lord hath manifested his love, by condescending to become the moral Governor of his rational creatures. Infinite wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth,

are indispensably requisite in the Sovereign of the universe. His government must be infinitely perfect, and of the highest possible advantage to all creatures. "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice:" for nothing, but enmity and rebellion, can be dissatisfied. The law also, being holy, just, and good, was dictated by perfect love. Like a wise and kind Father, the Lord requires us to love him with all our hearts, and to love others as ourselves: every other requirement may be readily resolved into these two great commandments; and if they were universally obeyed, universal harmony and felicity would be the consequence. Yet this is the law, against which the corrupt passions of man's heart rise in desperate enmity!—Who then can deny that GOD is LOVE?

But the law is enforced by an awful sanction, and it denounces an awful curse against every transgressor: what then shall we say to this? It would not perhaps be difficult to prove, that the punishments, threatened in the law and inflicted by the justice of God, result from love directed by infinite wisdom: not love of the individuals, whose final condemnation is determined, but enlarged benevolence to universal being through eternal ages. This however, would carry us too far from our subject: it must therefore suffice to observe, that in the government of accountable creatures, who act voluntarily, and are influenced by motives, the denunciation of punishment must form a part of the system: and if this punishment be only inflicted on the disobedient, and do not exceed the heinousness of their crimes; while it tends to retain multitudes in obedience, and preserve the universe

from the effects of general rebellion, it must prove a publick benefit, and consist with wise and holy love. That must be the most beneficent plan, which secures the greatest, most extensive, and permanent advantages to the most excellent part of moral agents: and the philosophical notion, that the felicity even of sinful creatures is the ultimate end proposed to himself by the Governor of the world, is not more repugnant to scripture, than to the common sense and opinion of mankind in similar cases. A wise ruler of a nation, in proportion as he loved his people, would be careful, by good laws impartially executed, to restrain the ill-disposed from injuring their fellow subjects, and disturbing the peace of the community: and if this made it necessary to punish with death some individuals, these would be considered as suffering for the public good; and, provided they deserved their doom, it would not be deemed an impeachment of his paternal love to his people. On the contrary, the prince, who under the plea of clemency should neglect to punish evil doers, and to protect his peaceable subjects, might indeed be the favourite of the fraudulent and rapacious, but his conduct would be reprobated by all honest men.

But as we are not capable of fully comprehending the plan of the divine government, let us turn our thoughts to another view of the subject.—The Lord hath shewn that he is love, in his dealings with sinful men, by his patience and providential bounty. Could we possibly witness all the crimes of every description, with all their aggravations, which are perpetrated in London, or any other large city, during

a single day; could we see the malignity of every sin, and conceive of them all as committed against *us*, by persons on whom we had conferred the greatest favours; and did we possess the unrestrained power of executing vengeance; I am persuaded that our patience would be wearied out before evening. But the Lord at once sees all the sins committed in the whole world, together with the desperate wickedness of the human heart; he abhors, with unalterable and infinite hatred, every kind and degree of unholiness; he is able at any moment to punish sinners with irresistable vengeance; he could sustain no loss, if he destroyed all the workers of iniquity; and he might do it consistently with most perfect justice. Yet he bears with the rebellious of mankind from age to age; he endures the provocations of guilty lands, during the course of revolving centuries, while their presumptuous ingratitude continually increases; he prolongs the lives of individuals to fifty, sixty, seventy, or eighty years, while they defy his justice, ridicule his works and word, or persecute to death his inoffensive worshippers! This is a very affecting illustration of the subject, and a convincing proof that GOD is LOVE. "It is of the Lord's mercies that "we are not consumed:" and besides the value of a reprieve to a condemned criminal, several of us are under unspeakable obligations to the long-suffering of our God; as he spared us during many years, when we lived in unrepented sin, that he might at length make us partakers of his great salvation.

But, as if exemption from deserved misery were a small matter, the Lord confers on sinful men an exuberance of temporal comforts and benefits. From

year to year he fills the earth with his riches: summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, do not fail: things most necessary to the life of man, are most plentifully bestowed; but the revolving seasons bring us a constant succession of valuable productions, to regale us with an agreeable variety of indulgence: and though we too commonly abuse this bounty to the dishonour of the Giver, every sense is liberally gratified with its proper object. The Lord holdeth our souls in life: his arm protects us, and his providence watches over us; while perhaps we proudly refuse to supplicate his favour, or ungratefully neglect to acknowledge his mercy. He defends us from sickness, or heals our infirmities; he corrects with gentleness, and seems in haste to relieve our distresses: he sometimes shews us the danger, that our deliverance may be the more affecting; but more frequently he spares us the alarm, though he knows this will render us less attentive to his kindness. In these, and various similar instances, "the Lord is "loving unto every man:" "He maketh his sun to "rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain "on the just and on the unjust." "Oh that men "would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, "and for his wonderful works to the children of "men."

These are, however, subordinate proofs that GOD is LOVE; and the apostle did not so much as stop to notice them; but with a beautiful abruptness hastened to select the grand illustration and demonstration of his doctrine: "In this was manifest the love of God "towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten "son into the world, that we might live through him."

" Herein was love, not that we loved God, but that he " loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for " our sins." The Lord's purpose of pardoning sinners and advancing them to a higher degree of glory and felicity than that from which they had fallen, is not considered as the grand proof that God is love; though the knowledge of him and of ourselves will convince us, that it is too vast for our capacities, and exceeds all computation: but *the means* of our recovery and reconciliation are represented as exhibiting a still more astonishing illustration of the subject. Could the blessings designed us have been honourably conferred by an act of sovereignty, without the intervention of a Mediator and an atoning sacrifice, as a prince pardons and then prefers a man who has been guilty of treason; the obligation would have been immense. But it appears that this was impossible, because the Lord cannot deny himself, or act inconsistently with his own perfections. When therefore, the honour of his law and justice seemed to place an insurmountable barrier to the exercise of pardoning mercy; when he could have glorified himself in the destruction of our rebellious race, and in creating worlds replenished with nobler inhabitants; that he should form and accomplish the plan of saving us by the incarnation and sufferings of his only-begotten Son, was most stupendous mercy! That he should do this unsolicited by sinners; yea, while they continued to harden their hearts in daring rebellion against him! That he should both purpose the design of reconciling the world to himself by the interposition of a Surety; and, when the whole creation could not supply any being, whose dignity, love,

and power, were adequate to the arduous and gracious undertaking; that he should so love the world, as to give his only, his well-beloved Son, to assume the nature and become the Brother of apostate man, that he might be his Redeemer, by a life of suffering obedience, and an agonizing death upon the cross! In this, says the apostle, is love! It is the grandest display, that ever was, or ever will be made of God as Love. It exceeds, and swallows up all the thoughts of men; and even of angels, who desire to look down into these things with unceasing admiration and rapturous delight.

Let it also be carefully observed, that the centre of these adorable wonders of divine mercy is not fixed in the circumstance of Christ, as *incarnate*, dying on the cross for sinners; but in the *incarnation* of the only begotten Son of God, that he might thus suffer and die for them!

We now therefore consider the Saviour as come into the world; his name EMMANUEL, God with us; his humiliation, obedience, and sufferings accomplished. We next contemplate him rising from the grave, ascending into heaven, and in our nature appearing in the presence of God for us, as our High Priest and Advocate; exalted to the mediatorial throne, reigning over all creatures, and possessed of all power and fulness, for the salvation of every sinner who comes to God by him.

Had men known their real situation and character; and had it been intimated, that reconciliation to God, recovery to holiness, and admission to everlasting felicity might *possibly be attained*, by journeying to some

remote inhospitable region, and performing certain arduous conditions: none would have acted *reasonably*, who hesitated to go in search of this invaluable advantage. In such a concern, all other pursuits ought to be relinquished or suspended, and every danger or hardship disregarded: no delay should be admitted, but all ought immediately to set out for the appointed place, and communicate the interesting report to others, till it spread through the whole earth, as the most rejoicing tidings, which ever reached the ears of sinful man.

But the Lord knew that we were not thus *reasonable;* nay wholly indisposed to regard distant rumours, or to make inconvenient enquiries about salvation. He therefore, according to the purposes of his boundless love, appointed a number of reconciled sinners to execute the ministry of reconciliation, by going abroad into the world, and preaching the gospel to every creature. He invested them with miraculous powers, and inspired them with holy affections; he prepared them for patient sufferings and unwearied labours, and sent them with the glad tidings of his grace to sinners of every description, language, or climate. He ordered them not only to state and confirm the truths of Christianity; but to warn, invite, persuade, expostulate, and beseech sinners, in his name, to be reconciled to God. In this embassy, the vilest blasphemer, oppressor, murderer, and persecutor, is included; not even the hoary-headed profligate is excepted! All things are ready: all men every where are commanded to repent, and invited to believe in the Son of God: nor is it possible that a sinner can want any thing

which is not promised to all who seek it by earnest prayer.

Miraculous powers have indeed long since been withdrawn; but the same ministry of reconciliation is continued: nor does any thing at this day so much prevent the gospel from spreading throughout the earth, as the disinclination to receive it which is universally manifested. Every heart is closed against the divine message, by self-flattering prejudices and carnal affections; men of all nations and orders unite in opposing its admission among them; and the events, recorded in the Acts of the apostles, have in this respect taken place, again and again, as often as the unadulterated Gospel of Christ has been sent to those parts of the world, which were before unacquainted with it.

This may suggest a proper answer to the objections of infidels against revelation, on the ground of its not being universal. The Lord indeed is not bound to vouchsafe unmerited benefits to all, or to any of his creatures. "May he not do what he will with his "own?" The objection therefore is replete with presumption. Yet it may also be observed, that ministers are commissioned and instructed to use their utmost endeavours, that the knowledge of the gospel may be rendered universal; and that numbers have been, and still are, ready, at any personal risk, to attempt it: but the lusts of men raise such barriers against them, as nothing but Omnipotence can surmount or remove. Even in this *Christian* land, the genuine religion of the Bible scarcely ever finds admission into any place, but in the midst of opposition;

contempt, and reproach: and no man should attempt to preach it: without standing prepared for degradation of character, or exclusion from preferments which he might otherwise have expected. Many friends to the truth are so influenced by this consideration, that they bring forward the peculiar doctrines of the gospel with cautious hand, in hopes to insinuate them almost imperceptibly: and few of those who now glory in the cross of Christ will deny, that once their hearts greatly disliked that humiliating subject.

Yet still, our God perseveres in sending his message to sinners, even forcing it upon their attention, and requiring his ministers to venture their scorn and resentment, by their intrusions and importunity! And at last, when the carnal heart still persists in rejecting the gracious proposal: "of his great love wherewith "he loved them, even when they were dead in sin, "he quickens them by his grace; and makes them "willing in the day of his power." When therefore we affirm that GOD is LOVE, we may apply it, to the love of the Father in giving his only Son to become our Saviour; to the love of the Son, in assuming our nature, coming into this sinful world, and dying on the cross for our sins, that he might be our all-prevailing Advocate; and to the love of the Spirit, in regenerating, sanctifying, and comforting our hearts: that so "Glory may be to the Father, and to the Son, "and to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning, "is now, and ever shall be, world without end: "Amen."

It would lead us too far to expatiate on the various instances of the Lord's unspeakable love to his be-

lieving people; his condescending regard to their minutest concerns; his tender sympathy with them in all their trials; his readiness to forgive even their renewed offences, and "restore to them the joy of his salvation;" his providential care in restraining their enemies, moderating their temptations, supplying their wants, and answering their prayers; his kind acceptance of their feeble services; the consolations he affords them, especially in trouble; and his marvellous interposition in rendering their sufferings most efficacious medicines, and the king of terrors a messenger of peace. These and many other topicks might be enlarged on, to illustrate the proposition that GOD is LOVE. But we must,

III. Proceed to mention some perverse inferences which are frequently made from the text. 'If God 'be LOVE,' say some men, 'may we not conclude 'that he will not make his creatures miserable?' Now this strange inference not only contradicts the general tenour of scripture, the divine revelation of which it supposes; but it is refuted by undeniable facts: for most certainly sinful creatures do suffer many and great miseries. Not to mention the instances recorded in the sacred volume, concerning the Lord's dealings with fallen angels and sinful men; can we live in the world, and not both witness and feel the effects of the divine displeasure against transgressors? Are not whole cities and nations desolated by the scourge of war, or by famines, pestilences, and earthquakes? Do not various diseases continually sweep immense multitudes into the grave, after enduring most excruciating pains? Are not the survivors bereaved of their

choicest comforts, and penetrated with exquisite anguish? Is not the earth, in every part, filled with sighs, tears, groans, and bitter complaints? And are not all these afflictions the appointment of God, as punishments of sin, comprised in the first sentence denounced on fallen man, "In sorrow shalt thou eat bread all the days "of thy life,—till thou return to the ground:—for dust "thou art, and to dust shalt thou return?"*

These sufferings are indeed turned into blessings to believers, and they are often useful in bringing sinners to repentance; but in themselves they are miseries, and frequently arise by natural consequence from men's vices: so that it is most evident that God doth punish sin with great severity. Hence we may learn, that we cannot judge concerning his conduct, from our own duty in apparently similar cases. In our private capacity, we ought not to inflict misery, or withhold relief when we are able to afford it, on account of any provocations whatever: but the duty of magistrates, in respect of malefactors, much more resembles the case under consideration. We should however, frame to ourselves the most deplorable scenes imaginable; and then enquire whether a benevolent man would not have prevented or relieved such miseries, if it had been in his power? And the answer to this enquiry must convince every one, who does not deny the superintending providence of God, or blaspheme his name, that we are incompetent judges on such subjects.

* Gen. iii. 16—19.

Yet many, who will not argue against these conclusions, would infer from the text, that God will not make any of his creatures finally and eternally miserable. But the deduction ought to be this: "GOD is LOVE:" 'therefore he will not cause any creature to suffer, unless some wise, holy, and benevolent purpose can be answered by its sufferings.' It would not consist with infinite love to give one moment's *needless* uneasiness; and it may consist with infinite love to make sinners eternally miserable; if the glory of God, and the interests of the universe through eternal ages, render it indispensably necessary. Facts demonstrate, to all who allow God to be infinite in justice and goodness, that durable sufferings may be inflicted consistently with those perfections. Complicated and long-continued miseries are very common: and death, the most dreaded of all temporal evils, cannot possibly be avoided. This seems to bring matters to extremities: for if the greatest punishment which God hath threatened to inflict on sinners in this world, never fails to be executed; who can prove, or even probably conjecture, that the Lord will not accomplish his most tremendous denunciations of eternal misery? He is TRUTH as well as LOVE: and will any man seriously attempt to exalt his love by denying his truth? He hath said, that "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from hea-"ven—in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that "know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our "Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with "everlasting destruction;" for they shall go away into

everlasting punishment."* And surely "God is not "a man that he should lie—hath he said, and shall he "not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make "it good?"†

The grandest display of the love of God doth equally declare his justness and holiness: and will not men allow that he is LOVE, unless he will, as it were, abdicate his throne, dishonour his name, and neglect the interests of his obedient subjects, in order to preserve impenitent rebels from deserved punishment? These reflections ought rather to convince us, that there is a malignity in sin, of which men are not aware; seeing God so terribly threatens and severely punishes his offending creatures, and yet rescues a penitent remnant in so stupendous a manner.

But some still contend that God will save all *sincere* persons, each in his own way; and support this antiscriptural opinion by the words of our text.—Leaving at present the case of those who never were favoured with the clear light of divine revelation: let it be observed, that if they, who are fully informed, or might be did they properly improve their advantages, persist in neglecting the way of salvation revealed in the scriptures to depend on their moral virtues, rational schemes, or self-invented observances; if they treat the truth of God as a lie, and count that wisdom which angels adore, to be foolishness; if they regard the stupendous love of God in giving his Son to be the Sa-

* Matt. xxv, 46. 2 Thess. i, 8.

† Numb. xxiii, 19.

viour of the world as needless; and then pretend that he will condemn no man for unavoidable errors: let them look to it, for evil is before them. The whole scriptures declares unbelief to be the offspring of pride, and the love of sin: and that such men continue under the unqualified sentence of final condemnation.

Sincerity is an ambiguous term: *sincerely* to hate infinite good and despise infinite excellency; and thus to be very *sincere* in fighting against God and persecuting his saints; nay, sincerity in supporting the tenets of philosophy and morality, or superstition, against the sure testimony of God, is very different from sincere repentance, faith in Christ, love of his people, and obedience to his commands. Yet men, either *artfully* or *ignorantly*, confound these distinct ideas; and then pretend that *sincerity* is all that is necessary to salvation.

But this short specimen must suffice: though many more false inferences from the text might be mentioned: the wise man has, however, summed them all up in one verse: "Because sentence against an evil work "is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the "sons of men are fully set in them to do evil."*

IV. Let us in the last place make some practical use of the subject.

The view of the unfathomable love of God, which hath been given, should increase men's abhorrence of sin and dread of its consequences. The more glo-

* Eccles. viii, 11.

rious and excellent the Lord appears to be, the greater degree of odiousness must be contained in every transgression against him; and crimes committed under the clear light of the gospel must, on that account, be peculiarly inexcusable. While, therefore, sinners should take warning to flee from the wrath to come, (for "how will they escape if they neglect so great "salvation," and harden themselves in disobedience, because our God is merciful?) it is incumbent on us all to humble ourselves more and more for all our numberless offences, as most hateful and unreasonable, because committed against infinite goodness and excellency.

On the other hand the subject is most delightfully suited to encourage the poor trembling penitent, how many or heinous soever his sins may have been. Poor desponding soul, remember that GOD is LOVE. Consider what he hath done to make way for the honourable exercise of his mercy. There were two obstacles in the way of our felicity; namely, his justice and our proud obstinacy. He hath removed the former by "not sparing his own Son," but giv- "ing him a sacrifice for our sins; and he overcomes the latter, when he "gives us repentance to the acknowledging of his truth." If then thou dost now submit to his righteousness, confess thy sins, and apply for salvation, according to his merciful invitations; thou mayest assuredly expect a gracious reception: for he, who commended his love to his enemies, by giving his own Son to die for them, cannot reject the weeping contrite supplicant, who pleads the all-pre-

vailing name of Jesus; in humble faith, and fervent desires of finding mercy and grace through him.

Here again we may learn the standard of true excellency. The most shining characters, which genius hath selected to immortalize, have commonly been illustriously mischievous; and the unqualified admiration, with which they are often mentioned, exceedingly misleads inexperienced youth. But GOD is LOVE; and the more we resemble and imitate him in this endearing attribute, the greater real excellency we unquestionably possess. Let us then be "followers of God," and "walk in love," after his pattern, in all "the various displays of it which have been considered: then we shall certainly be known and approved as his children, and found meet for the eternal inheritance of his heavenly kingdom.

Finally, if we be conscious of having "fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us" in the gospel, let us receive the trials allotted us, as the wise and holy appointments of divine love; let us not judge of the Lord's dispensations by our feelings or reasonings, but by his holy word: and let us submit to his will, whatever he may withhold, take away, or inflict; assured that he manages all our concerns in that manner, which is most conducive to our eternal interests, and best suited to illustrate the riches of his paternal liberality.

SERMON V.

ACTS, xxvi. 19, 20.

Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

THE propriety and address of St. Paul's speech before Agrippa, Festus, and that august assembly, in whose presence he stood as the prisoner of Jesus Christ, have been generally admired: but the faithfulness and courage, with which he pleaded the cause of the gospel, are perhaps still more deserving of our attention. He paid no court to his illustrious auditors: he attempted not to ingratiate himself with them, or even to shun their contempt or aversion; while he used the most effectual means of convincing them, not only that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but that faith in him was absolutely necessary to salvation, and that all men without exception ought "to repent, and turn to God, and "do works meet for repentance."

Having given a brief narration of his own miraculous conversion, he produced his commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles; "I have appeared unto thee," says the divine Saviour,—"to make thee a minister and "a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, "and of those things in the which I will appear unto "thee: delivering thee from the people and the gen- "tiles, to whom now I send thee; to open their eyes, "and to turn them from darkness to light, and from "the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive "forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them "which are sanctified, by faith that is in me. Where- "upon," says the apostle, "I was not disobedient to "the heavenly vision, but shewed," first to the Jews and then to the gentiles, "that they should repent and "turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." In doing this, "he was not disobedient to the heaven- "ly vision:" for in his view of Christianity, these practical subjects perfectly accorded with the doctrines of faith and grace. The several Christian graces may, and should, be *distinguished*, as they have their appropriate nature and use; but they cannot be *separated* in the person who possesses them. For instance, an impenitent believer, and an unbelieving penitent are ideal characters: true faith is a penitent faith, and true repentance is believing repentance: yet the nature and use of repentance and faith should plainly be distinguished. This will appear more evidently, while from the text we take occasion to consider,

I. The importance of the subject, as it appears from the scriptures.

II. Certain things which are implied in it.

III. The peculiar nature of repentance and turning unto God.

IV. And lastly. The works meet for repentance.

I. Let me call your attention, my brethren, to the importance or prominence of this subject, as it appears from the scriptures, especially from the new Testament.

John the Baptist was the predicted forerunner of the Messiah, who was sent to prepare the way of the Lord, when he came in human nature among his ancient people the Jews: but how did he execute his important office? He came preaching, "Repent ye, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Let me intreat your serious attention to this circumstance: — notwithstanding the advantages of that favoured nation, with all their notions and form of godliness; there was no order of men, no religious sect, no individual whatever, that did not want repentance, as a preparation for welcoming the Messiah, and sharing the blessings of his spiritual kingdom. Insomuch, that the Baptist said to the Pharisees, as well as to the Sadducees, "O "generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee "from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits "meet for repentance: and think not to say within "yourselves, We have Abraham to our father*." Not long after, our Lord himself condescended to preach the gospel; and he too said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." When the apostles went forth at his command, they "preached every

* Matt. iii. 7—10.

" where that men should repent:" and it appears from part of his discourse to the seventy disciples, that they were charged with the same commission; for he said on that occasion, " Woe unto thee, Cho-" razin, woe unto thee, Bethsaida; for if the mighty " works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which " have been done in thee, they had a great while ago " repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes."*

Does our Lord say in one place, " The Son of " man came to seek and to save that which was lost?" He elsewhere explains it, " I came not to call the " righteous, but sinners to repentance." Does the good Shepherd rejoice and call his friends to rejoice with him, when he has brought home the lost sheep? " So likewise is there joy in heaven," even " among " the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth:" and when the prodigal, returning to his father, was graciously welcomed, all the family was called on to rejoice; " for this, my son, was lost and is found, was " dead and is alive."

On the other hand Christ " *upbraided* the cities, in " which his mighty works had been done, because " they repented not." He told the people, " that the " men of Nineveh would rise up in judgment with " that generation and condemn it; because they re-" pented at the preaching of Jonas: and behold " a greater than Jonas is here." He warned the Jews that " except they repented, they would all likewise " perish." And he summed up the reasons of his gentleness to notorious sinners, and his severity in re-

* Luke, x. 10—14.

buking the Pharisees, in this remarkable passage:— "A certain man had two sons; and he came to the "first and said, Son, go work to-day in my vine-"yard. He answered and said, I will not: but af-"terward he repented and went. And he came to "the second and said likewise: and he answered and "said, I go, sir; and went not. Whether of them "twain did the will of his father? They say unto "him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I "say unto you, the publicans and harlots go into the "kingdom of heaven before you. For John came "to you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed "him not: but the publicans and harlots believed him: "and ye, when ye had seen it, *repented* not after-"wards, that *ye might believe him!*"*

When our Lord was risen, and about to ascend unto the Father, he said to his apostles, "Go ye, preach "the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and "is baptized shall be saved: and he that believeth not, "shall be damned." And again, "Thus it is writ-"ten, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise "from the dead the third day; and that repentance "and remission of sins should be preached in his "name unto all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."† We may know how the apostles understood their Lord, after they were filled with the Holy Ghost, if we attend to Peter, on the day of Pentecost, thus addressing the convinced Jews, "Repent and be bap-"tized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, "for the remission of sins:" and afterwards "Repent

* Matt. xxi. 28—32. † Mark, xvi. 15, 16. Luke, xxiv. 46, 47.

"and be converted, *that your sins may be blotted* "*out;*" not *because your sins are blotted out*, as some modern systems seem to require: and why should men alter the order of scriptural exhortations, unless they mean to change the doctrine of scripture?*

When Peter related the circumstances of Cornelius's conversion, to his brethren at Jerusalem, they made this remark, "Then hath God also to the gentiles granted repentance unto life."† When Paul at Athens, before the celebrated council of Areopagus, boldly exposed the ignorance of this renowned seat of pagan philosophy, he said, "The times of this ig- "norance God winked at, but now commandeth *all* "*men every where* to repent."‡ And stating the substance of his preaching before the elders of Ephesus, he thus expressed himself, "Testifying both to "the Jews and also to the Gentiles, repentance toward "God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."§

The same apostle, addressing the unbelieving Jews, thus expostulates with them, "Despisest thou the "riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long- "suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God "leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness "and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself "wrath against the day of wrath?"‖ To the Corinthians he says, "Godly sorrow worketh repentance "unto salvation not to be repented of." And he expressed his fears that when he came among them he

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* Acts ii. 38. iii. 13. † Acts, xi. 18. ‡ Acts, xvii. 30.
§ Acts, xx. 21. ‖ Rom. ii. 4, 5.

should "lament many, which had sinned and had not repented."* When he described the case of those who had sinned beyond the reach of mercy, he says it is "impossible to renew them to repentance:" and on the other hand he directed Timothy "in meekness "to instruct those that opposed themselves, if per- "adventure God would give them repentance to the "acknowledging of the truth." Where it is particularly to be remarked that *repentance* is considered as an essential preparation of mind for the reception of the truth, in order that they may "recover them- "selves out of the snare of the devil, who have been "taken captive by him at his will."† And this agrees with Peter's advice to Simon Magus, "Repent of this "thy wickedness and pray God, if perhaps the thought "of thy heart may be forgiven thee."‡

These testimonies may probably be deemed more than sufficient: but let it be remembered, that we are not only concerned to prove the truth of the doctrine; it is also requisite to shew that repentance is indispensably necessary to salvation, and has been a matter of the last importance in religion under every dispensation. I shall however, only select one passage from the Old Testament, with which to conclude this part of our subject. "I will judge you, every one "according to your ways, saith the Lord God: re- "pent and turn yourselves from all your transgres- "sions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast from "you all your transgressions, whereby ye have trans-

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* 2 Cor. vii. 10. xii. 21. † 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26. Heb. vi. 6.
‡ Acts, viii. 22.

"gressed, and make you a new heart and a new spi-
"rit, for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I
"have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith
"the Lord God; therefore repent, and turn ye*."—
Let us then consider,

II. Certain things, which are implied in the language of the text, "That men should repent, and "turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

It is evidently implied in these words, that all men have sinned. God would never require any one to repent, who had never offended: yet "he commands "all men every where to repent." Sin is the transgression of the divine law, either by omission or commission, by defect or redundance, in thought, word, or deed. Few indeed of the human race are acquainted with the full extent and spirituality of this perfect rule: yet all know more than they practise. Every man's conscience therefore must testify, if he allow himself time for reflection, that he hath often wilfully neglected his known duty and acted contrary to the conviction of his own mind, for the sake of some worldly object.

But "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of "men;" and not merely against a few scandalous and enormous crimes. Many painful effects of the divine displeasure are experienced during the present life, which universally terminate in death: then the sinner's "body returns to the dust whence it was "taken, and the soul returns to God that gave it."

* Ezek. xviii. 30—32.

Criminals suffer many things previous to their trial; but the principal punishment is subsequent to condemnation: thus "it is appointed to men once to die, "and after death the judgment:" and we are "warned to flee from the wrath *to come*," from which Jesus delivers his people, who must suffer and die like other men. The connexion therefore between sin and future condemnation to everlasting punishment, which cannot be escaped without repentance, is clearly implied in the language of the text.

Nor should we forget, that this condemnation is *merited;* for unless sin deserves the punishment denounced, there can be no free mercy in remiting it. When the apostles were sentenced to stripes or death, for preaching the gospel, they might lament the injustice of the magistrates, but they could not repent of their own conduct in "obeying God rather than "men." Such persons as deem the laws of any country iniquitous, and their governors oppressive, will complain when they suffer for disobedience; but they cannot *repent*, unless they be convinced that they have been criminal. It would carry us too far, to illustrate the justice of God in the sentence pronounced against transgressors, by stating the rebellion, ingratitude, and enmity, which more or less connect with all our violations of the divine law: but surely, if crimes against our fellow creatures may deserve death; sins against our infinitely glorious Creator merit a punishment proportionably more dreadful. It is not commonly supposed that malefactors are sufficiently impartial, even if in other respects competent, to decide on the equity of the laws, or to amend the criminal

code. It becomes us, therefore, rather to submit to the justice of God, and to supplicate his mercy, than to reply against him, as if we "would condemn him "that we may be justified."

Our text implies likewise, that all have turned away from God. The characters of men are greatly diversified, but all "have forsaken the Fountain of living "waters, to hew out for themselves broken cisterns "that can hold no water." Apostacy from God, or a refusal to render him the worship, love, gratitude, and obedience which he demands; alienation of heart from him, and a disposition to seek happiness any where, rather than in his favour and service, are universal. "All we like sheep have gone astray, we "have turned every one to his own way." All men are become idolaters; they desire and delight supremely in the creature, in one form or other: while a self-sufficient independent spirit, a proneness to self-admiration, and to seek our own will or glory, as the ultimate end of all our actions, constitutes another kind of universal idolatry. Hence the necessity of repenting and turning to God, as the supreme object of our love, and the source of our felicity.

But we must also observe, that the text contains an intimation of mercy, and of the way in which the returning sinner may approach God with full confidence of a gracious reception. When a company of malefactors have been convicted on the clearest evidence of the most atrocious crimes; a command from their prince to own their guilt and apply for mercy in a prescribed way, would be considered as an encouragement to expect a pardon. A hope would

spring up in every breast; and if any who had unreservedly complied with this injunction, should at last be led to execution, they would think themselves trifled with, however just their punishment might otherwise be. Now the Lord hath revealed himself as infinitely merciful to the fallen race of men; he hath opened "a new and living way," for our approach to him upon a throne of grace; he hath invited us to draw near, and plead the name of our heavenly Advocate, and the merits of his atoning sacrifice; "he "hath commanded all men every where to repent:" and from these things we confidently infer, that every one, without exception, who 'through grace obeys 'the call,' will be saved, by the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus. In short, if any man were sinless, and had no need of repentance; or if any were so sinful that repentance would avail him nothing; the general language of the text would not be suited to the case: but as all have sinned, and "with the Lord there is "mercy and plenteous redemption;" as no impenitent sinner can be saved, and no true penitent can be lost; therefore all men are exhorted and commanded to "repent and turn to God, and do works meet for re-"pentance."

III. Then we proceed to consider the peculiar nature of repentance and turning unto God.

The parable of the prodigal son was evidently intended as an illustration of this important subject: and the following verse is a most suitable introduction to our discussion of it. "*When he came to himself*, he "said, How many hired servants of my father's have "bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hun-

"ger!" He had been infatuated, he had acted as one in a delirium, or insane: but now the disorder is removed, he awakes as out of sleep, recovers the use of his faculties, and perceives his misery and danger. He sees every object in a new light; he forms a very different judgment of his father's conduct, and the rules and privileges of his family; of his own perverse behaviour, of his associates in vice, and in short of every thing connected with his character, situation, and prospects. From this revolution in his judgment, a total alteration takes place in his conduct. He considers the meanest servant of his father as comparatively happy, and himself as a wretched outcast deservedly perishing. His only hope in this extreme distress arises from a persuasion of the tender compassion of his father, whom before he had regarded as opposing his happiness: and he determines at all events to return to him, and seek to be reconciled, as the only hope of escaping destruction.

Thus the sinner, having long thought the Lord a hard Master, and religion a wearisome service: and in vain sought liberty and pleasure in sin and folly; at length, by rich mercy, is brought to himself, recovers from his delirium or fascination, to see his misery and lament his madness. Now he perceives that God is worthy of all love, obedience, and adoration; that his law is holy, just, and good; that his service is perfect freedom, and his favour, life and felicity; and that sin is but another name for folly, bondage, and ruin. He is convinced that the poorest believer is far happier than the most prosperous of the wicked, that his past conduct calls for the deepest humiliation, that his pre-

sent situation is perilous in the extreme, and that his only refuge is in the compassion of that God, against whom he hath ungratefully rebelled. Influenced by such considerations, he arises from his grovelling indulgences and low pursuits; he repents and turns to God, with humble confessions and fervent prayers; he struggles through difficulties, resists temptations, and rises above dark desponding fears; and finds our heavenly Father far more ready to pardon, welcome, and bless him, than he could possibly have expected.

Yes, my brethren, many of you know the meaning of this parable by your own happy experience: and comparing the bitterness of your sinful courses, with the peace and joy which you have found in believing; you are ready to say to others, "Come, taste and see "how gracious the Lord is, and how blessed they are "that trust in him."—But are there not also among you some persons who never thus "came to them-"selves?" and have no acquaintance with the change that hath been described?—A few instances may indeed occur, where repentance and conversion have begun so early in life, and been matured so gradually, as to leave no distinct traces of this experience: but they who are strangers to it, are almost universally ignorant of vital Christianity and its saving efficacy. True converts, however imperceptible their progress, are always conscious of desires and dispositions, not natural to fallen man: and they are more prone to question, whether a change, wrought quietly and gradually, can be genuine; than to suppose a more distinct awakening to a sense of guilt and danger not before felt, to be in general unnecessary.

This "coming to themselves," is often attended with alarm and terror, (which, however, are not at all essential to repentance;) and it is always productive of godly sorrow; a deep and unfeigned concern for having offended our great and glorious Creator, broken his good laws, acted so foolish and base a part, and done so much injury to our neighbours and relatives. This is likewise connected with self-abasement, lowly thoughts of ourselves, and a disposition to plead guilty before God, and confess our sins unreservedly, with shame and remorse. Thus the Lord speaks of penitent Ephraim by his holy prophet. "I "have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a "bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. Turn thou "me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my "God. Surely after I was turned, I repented; and "after I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I "was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did "bear the reproach of my youth."*—The effects of repentance are described after a similar manner in Ezekiel: "That thou mayest remember and be con-"founded, and never open thy mouth any more for "thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that "thou hast done, saith the Lord God."† For "he "looketh upon men, and if any say I have sinned, and "perverted that which is right, and it profited me not, "he shall deliver his soul from going down into the "pit, and his life shall see the light."‡ "He that "covereth his sins shall not prosper; but he that con-

* Jer. xxxi, 18—20. † Ezek. xvi, 63. ‡ Job, xxxiii, 27, 28.

"fesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy." The returning prodigal makes no excuse for his conduct, but says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and "before thee, and am no more worthy to be called "thy son." And "the publican, who smote on his "breast, and cried, God be merciful to me a sinner, "went home justified," rather than the Pharisee that despised him. These are strong instances, which objectors would do well to reconsider.

While men continue to boast, to palliate their conduct, to throw the blame on others, or to attempt making amends for their sins, they are not truly penitent: but when their excuses are silenced, and they condemn themselves without reserve, they begin to shew a temper of mind suited to their situation and character. And never was food more grateful to one perishing with hunger, or liberty more welcome to the poor prisoner than the gospel of Christ is to every broken-hearted penitent. He may be exercised with doubts of its truth, or entertain notions partial or erroneous of its freeness and sufficiency: but as the grand obstacle to believing is removed, this preparation of heart making way for fuller illumination and conviction, he will soon most cordially approve and embrace the doctrine of salvation by the cross of Christ.

For the true penitent abhors and detests his sins; he despises and rejects the wages and pleasures of iniquity; he casts away with loathing all his transgressions, and dreads a relapse into them as the most dire calamity; and he renounces all other hopes of salvation, along with his former pursuits and connexions, that he may seek liberty and happiness in the favour

and service of his reconciled God. His former alienation is removed; he returns to him as his Rest and Refuge; and through many conflicts and discouragements, he comes to God, to yield himself to his service, to become his spiritual worshipper, and, "as "bought with a price to glorify him, in body and in "spirit, which are his."

In this manner all men are commanded to "repent "and turn to God," from their worldly idols and sinful pursuits!—And do you not find, my friends, that in keeping at a distance from the Fountain of living waters, you prolong your own distress and disappointment? Do none of you, while striving against conviction, or cleaving to your lusts and pleasures, and refusing to humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, experience such disquietude as the Psalmist has described? "When I kept silence, my bones "waxed old, through my roaring all the day long: "for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; "my moisture is turned into the drought in sum-"mer."* Why should you pertinaciously refuse to hearken to the voice of Christ, and the admonitions of your own consciences? Why refuse to draw near to God, that he may draw near unto you? Do you not sometimes feel, though unwilling to own it, that the warnings and counsels of your ministers are reasonable, and that it would be your highest interest to comply with them? Are you not ready to say, "Go "thy way at this time, when I have a convenient sea-"son I will call for thee?" But why do you delay to

* Ps. xxxii, 3, 4.

apply for relief, and embrace happiness? Have you not found the world to be vain and vexatious, and the pleasures of sin bitter and painful? Have not all endeavours to establish your own righteousness, or overcome your own passions, habits, and temptations, proved wearisome and unsuccessful? Hear then the words of the sinner's Friend, while he speaks to you in accents of the tenderest love. "Wherefore do ye "spend money for that which is not bread, and "your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken "diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, "and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline "your ear and come unto me, hear and your soul "shall live." "Seek ye the Lord, while he may be "found; call ye upon him while he is near: Let the "wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man "his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and "he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for "he will abundantly pardon."* Confess your sins, therefore, without reserve; forsake them without delay, renounce your former associates in ungodliness; "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, "and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive "you, and will be a Father to you, and ye shall be "my sons and my daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."† "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded; be afflicted, "and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned "into mourning, and your joy into heaviness; humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall

* Isai. lv. 6, 7. † 2 Cor. vi, 17, 18.

"lift you up."* Make no more vain excuses; pretend not that your sins have been few or small; be not afraid to view them in their full magnitude and malignity; trust only in the mercy of the Father, the atoning blood and prevailing mediation of the Son, and the powerful grace of the holy Spirit; return to the Lord with weeping and supplications; and speedily your sorrows shall be turned into joy, and your heaviness into glad songs of grateful praise.

But men not only should "repent and turn to God;" we must also call on them to do works meet for repentance; and this leads us,

IV. To consider what is meant by this clause of the text.

If a man truly repent of any misconduct, which hath proved injurious to himself or others, he would be glad, were it possible, to undo what he recollects with shame and remorse. This is indeed impracticable; yet frequently the effects may be prevented or counteracted; and this is a work meet for repentance, especially if it be done with much loss and self-denial. This consideration, however, may suggest a powerful inducement to early piety: for even if the sinner should be spared, and live to repent in his riper years, he will seldom be able to prevent the mischievous effects of his youthful iniquities; and that, which is practicable and indispensable, will resemble "the cut-"ting off of a right hand, or the plucking out of a right "eye."

* Jam. iv, 6—10.

He who has in any way defrauded others, cannot be thought "to do works meet for repentance," unless he makes restitution to the best of his ability and recollection; whatever mortifying or self-denying circumstances attend it: for without this, *he retains the wages of his crimes, and perpetuates his injustice.* But as one vice often wastes the gains of another, restitution may be absolutely impracticable; and in many cases it is almost impossible to know to whom restitution should be made, even if a man is able and willing to make it. When therefore the apostle says, "Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him "labour, working with his hand the thing which is "good, that he may have to give to him that need-"eth;"* he seems to counsel such persons to submit to hard labour and mean fare, that by giving to the poor, they might make such restitution, as their circumstances allowed of: and this is certainly a work meet for repentance. Were this lowly, industrious, and self-denying conduct more common among professors of the gospel; they would more frequently be enabled to adorn the doctrine of Christ by an unrequired restitution for wrongs, which the laws of men do not notice, but which a tender well-informed conscience cannot overlook. And when wrong has been done, and the individuals who have been injured cannot be exactly ascertained, the poor, especially of the families which have been wronged, should be considered as best entitled to the restitution. This however, is certain, that the professed penitent himself,

* Eph. iv. 28.

whether he have defrauded individuals or the publick, cannot retain it, either as a treasure to hoard up, or as a source of indulgence, without "putting an accursed "thing among his own stuff, and becoming an ac- "cursed thing like unto it."*—But we may have traduced the characters, poisoned the principles, or corrupted the morals of others, or in various ways injured them, if we have not robbed them of their property: and though adequate restitution cannot be made; yet we should do all in our power to counteract the effects of our misconduct, and to promote their best interests; if we would evidence the sincerity of our repentance and faith, and of our love to God and man.

He that well understands the gospel of Christ, and the nature of genuine repentance, will readily perceive, that forgiveness of injuries, and love of enemies, are peculiarly required by the words of the text. The man who refuses to forgive, surely forgets his own need of forgiveness. And he, who will do nothing for his enemies, can have no proper sense of his own sinfulness, and of the love of God in reconciling us when enemies by the death of his Son. The view, which the true penitent has of Christ, dying on the cross, and praying for his murderers, will render it easy to him, to pity and love his most determined foes, to do good to them that hate him, and pray for them that despitefully use him and persecute him. These too are works meet for repentance; without

* Josh. vii. 11—15.

which all tears, confessions, and even restitution, can never prove it genuine and unfeigned.

Patience under afflictions, contentment in our situation, thankfulness for mercies, and meekness under provocations, might be separately considered, did time permit. But in general, an habitual walk in newness of life, comprises the whole. "The grace of God "that bringeth salvation, teaches us, that, denying "ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live so-"berly, righteously, and godly in this present world;" watching and praying against the sins which once had most entire dominion over us; redeeming our time, and improving our talents, doing good to all men, especially to the household of faith; a circumspect conduct, and a constant attendance on the ordinances of God; a humble deportment in the family and community, as well as in the church; and a care to "ex-"ercise ourselves daily to have a conscience void of "offence, towards God and man:" these I say are works meet for repentance.—When the people asked John Baptist what they should do, in compliance with his exhortation to this effect; he did not require them to retire into deserts, or immure themselves in cloysters, nor even to torment themselves with excessive austerities: but he recommended liberal charity, strict integrity, and a harmless and exemplary conduct even in the station of publicans and soldiers.

But these hints must suffice, as every reflecting person will be able to branch out the general rules laid down, into a variety of particulars; and the grand use of preaching is, to lead men to reflection.

Perhaps, however, I am addressing some persons, who still object to the subject; and confiding in the rectitude of their hearts, and the undeviating virtue of their conduct, count the doctrine of repentance and conversion wholly foreign to their case. I have heard persons of this description gravely observe, that 'it 'would be much better to preach the necessity of a good 'life, than to dwell on repentance; except among the 'refuse of the species, of whom indeed little hope 'could be entertained.' But how can such men help seeing, that they only repeat the objections of the Pharisees against Christ himself, and exactly resemble these ancient opposers of the gospel? I would however, at present only say; If any one of you had a son, whom you had tenderly treated from his birth, and who should yet act with as much disregard to your counsel and authority, as you have done to those of your Creator, would you not think that he ought to repent of his ungrateful behaviour? And have you then no cause for repentance? Verily whatever you may think, it will hereafter appear, that there "is joy "in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than "over ninety and nine such just persons that need no "repentance." But does any one say, 'I own in 'general that I ought to repent; yet I find a strange 'insensibility of conscience, and backwardness to 'humble myself before God, or to renounce the plea-'sures of sin; and a grievous propensity to delay the 'necessary business, till my alarms and convictions 'vanish without any abiding effect.' To you, my friend, I would observe that repentance is the gift of God; and that Jesus is exalted "to give repentance

" and remission of sins." Pray therefore to the Lord to 'give you repentance and his holy Spirit:' cry in the language of Ephraim, " Turn thou me, and I " shall be turned;" and beg of him to take away the heart of stone, and to give the heart of flesh. Meditate also continually on the sufferings of Christ, the dignity of the sufferer, and the exhibition God hath given us, in that great transaction, both of his holy hatred of sin, and his compassionate love of sinners. This is the most effectual cure for a hard heart and an unfeeling conscience. " I will pour upon them " the Spirit of grace and supplication, and they " shall look on me whom they have pierced, and " mourn."*

But remember that life is uncertain; God, whom thou provokest, especially by impenitence, is the arbiter of thy life and death. The Holy Ghost " saith, " To day if you will hear his voice harden not your " hearts." Even if your days should be prolonged, you may be given over to final obduracy, and continuance in sin will be sure to increase the anguish of repentance, should you at last, by a miracle of mercy, be plucked as a brand out of the burning.

Above all, my fellow sinners, beware lest you be deceived with a false repentance, for nothing so effectually hardens men in impenitence. Some transient convictions, fears and sorrows, some partial reformation; a new creed, sect, or form of religion; enthusiastick joys and comforts, or delusive fancies of visions and revelations, frequently satisfy men's consciences

* Zech. xii. 10.

and fill them with spiritual pride; while their hearts remain unchanged, the root of sin unmortified, and no works are found meet for repentance!—Beware also of the partial despairing repentance of Judas, the temporary repentance of king Saul, the extorted repentance of Pharaoh, and the case of him who was almost persuaded to be a Christian.—Nor let it be imagined, that repentance and conversion to God are confined to the beginning of a religious profession: for as long as we continue sinful and prone to depart from the Lord, they must constitute our habitual practice, form the dispositions of our hearts, and influence all our tempers and our conduct.

On the other hand, let not the contrite mourner for sin despond: remember, poor trembling penitent, that "there is joy among the angels of God over one sin-"ner that repenteth." Yea, the Lord of angels, "sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied." Only beseech Him that thy repentance may be genuine and thy conversion entire; thus thou wilt surely find that he is ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy; and ere long thou wilt joyfully sing, "O Lord, I "will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, "thine anger is turned away and thou comfortest me." "For they that sow in tears shall reap in joy." "Let then the hearts of those rejoice that seek the "Lord."

Finally, my Christian brethren, while you are careful in other respects to do works meet for repentance: let me exhort you to enter into the spirit of the gospel by using every means and encouraging every endeavour, to bring sinners to repentance; and to welcome

every penitent with cordial joy and affection, as Ananias did the converted persecutor, "Brother Saul, the "Lord Jesus hath sent me, that thou mightest receive "thy sight." Thus you will manifest the excellency of your principles, and be honoured as instruments in promoting that cause, for which the divine Saviour came into the world and shed his blood upon the cross; and all men will know that you are his true disciples.

SERMON VI.

2 CORINTHIANS, v. 17.

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.

THE dangers, to which the church at Corinth was exposed from plausible false teachers, obliged the apostle to use such methods of re-establishing his authority, as he apprehended might be misunderstood and censured: he therefore says, "Whether we be "beside ourselves it is to God, or whether we be "sober it is for your cause."—The zealous servants of God have constantly been slighted and despised, as "beside themselves;" nay the Son of God, the perfection of wisdom and excellency, was involved in the same charge, even by his friends and relations, as well as by his enemies.* The apostle therefore would not be greatly disquieted, when, not only Festus said, "Paul thou art beside thyself, much learning doth

* 2 Kings, ix, 11. Jer. xxix, 26, 27. Hos. ix, 7. Mark, iii, 21. John, x, 20.

" make thee mad," but when his Corinthian converts concurred in the same sentiment.

'But,' says the apostle, 'Both the ardour that gives 'occasion to such imputations, and the wisdom which 'regulates its effects, spring from regard to the glory 'of God, and affectionate longing after your souls:' " For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we " thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all " dead; and that he died for all, that they which live, " should not henceforth live unto themselves, but un- " to him which died for them and rose again. Where- " fore henceforth know we no man after the flesh; " yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh; " yet now henceforth know we him no more." Even the brethren or nearest friends of Christ himself, according to the flesh, might not be regarded by the apostles, in dispensing instructions, reproofs, censures, or encouragements; but they were constrained by love to him who had died for them, to do all things with unbiassed impartiality. In like manner, no ties of blood, friendship, or even gratitude, must influence the servant of Christ, in the discharge of his pastoral office. In this respect even relations, benefactors, and patrons, must be disregarded, if we would approve ourselves to be indeed the genuine successors of the apostles in the sacred ministry. " Therefore," saith St. Paul, " if any man be in Christ he is a new " creature; old things are passed away; behold all " things are become new; and all things are of God " who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ."

The text suggests the following subjects to our consideration.

I. The apostle's description of a real Christian; "If any man be *in Christ*."

II. The change, which every real Christian has experienced; "He is a new creature."

III. The effects of this change, "Old things "are passed away; behold all things are become new."

I. Then we consider the apostle's description of a real Christian, "If any man be *in Christ*."

This expression may appear singular to many who are called Christians, but it is the uniform language of the new Testament: and "if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." New terms imperceptibly introduce new doctrines; nor has any subtility of Satan or his servants better succeeded, in "privily bringing in damnable heresies," than that of modernizing the language of divinity.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them "that are *in Christ Jesus*." "I knew a man *in Christ* "fourteen years ago." "He was also *in Christ* be-"fore me." Of whom are ye *in Christ* "Jesus, who "of God is made unto us, wisdom and righteousness, "and sanctification, and redemption."* "That we "might be made the righteousness of God *in him*." Many of the epistles also are addressed "to the saints "*in Christ Jesus*," "or to the church—*in* God the "Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ."—Which accords to the language of the prophet, "Israel shall "be saved *in the* LORD with an everlasting salvation." "Surely shall one say, *In the* LORD have I righteous-

* Rom. viii, 1. xvi. 7. 1 Cor. i. 30. 2 Cor. xii. 2.

" ness and strength." " *In the* LORD shall all the " seed of Israel be justified and shall glory."*

The apostle John also employs similar expressions; " And now, little children, abide *in him.*" " We " are *in him* that is true, even *in his Son Jesus Christ.*"† But the words of our Lord himself are most decisive; " He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, " dwelleth *in me* and I in him‡." Accordingly when we administer the Lord's supper, that outward sign of this inward life of faith in a crucified Saviour, we pray ' that we may so eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his ' blood;—that we may *dwell in him and he in us.*'— " Neither," saith our divine Redeemer, when interceding for his disciples, " pray I for these alone, but " for them also which shall believe on me through " their word; that they all may be one, as thou, Fa- " ther, art *in me, and I in thee, that they also may be* " *one in us.*"§

But we must explain this language and shew its propriety and energy; lest it should be thought, that the whole argument rests upon our translation of the original particles. St. Paul says, " The wages of sin " is death, but the gift of God is eternal life *through,*" or *in* " Christ Jesus our Lord:" And St. John, " This is the record that God hath given to us eter- " nal life, and this life is in his Son: he that hath the " Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God " hath not life."‖ The salvation of Christ is completed, as far as his mediatory work is concerned: but

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* Is. xlv. 17. 24, 25. † 1 John ii. 28. v. 20. ‡ John vi. 56.
§ John xvii. 20—23. ‖ Rom. vi. 23. 1 John v. 11, 12.

who are they that shall eventually be "saved from "wrath by him?" To this question the scripture answers with the most decided precision; "they that re- "ceive him," "they that believe in him," "they that "are found *in him*."—Union with Christ is necessary in order to communion with him: he saves all those, and those only, who thus stand related to him.

According to the illustrations of scripture, the believer is *in Christ*, as the stone is in the building. God is preparing a spiritual temple, in which he may dwell and be glorified for ever. The person of Christ is the precious Foundation and Corner-stone of this temple, and believers "come to him, and as living stones "are built up a spiritual house," "and habitation of "God through the Spirit*." But this emblem, taken from things wholly inanimate, only represents our dependence on Christ, and consecration to God through him: we therefore learn more fully the nature of this mystical union, by the parable of the vine and its branches. Mere nominal Christians continue unfruitful; and at length are taken away, withered, and gathered to be burned: but true believers are vitally united to him, and abide in him by the quickening and fructifying influences of the Holy Spirit.† Yet even this illustration falls short of fully elucidating the subject; nay, the nearest of all relative unions does not entirely answer to it; for believers are *in Christ*, as the members are in the human body. He is the Head of the church, and every Christian is a part of his mystical body, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh,

* 1 Pet. ii. 4—8. Eph. ii. 20—22. † John xv. 1—8.

and the Holy Spirit dwells in all believers, as the life and soul of this mystical body. They live spiritually by virtue of this union with their Head; they are placed under his guidance and authority; have one common interest, and fill up their stations in the church for the benefit of the whole.* According to the remarkable words of the apostle, "I am crucified "with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ "liveth in me."—"Your life is hid with Christ in "God; when Christ, who is our Life, shall appear, "then shall ye also appear with him in glory."†

There is, however, another way of illustrating the subject, which may help us to explain the way in which sinners attain to so high an honour, and so blessed a distinction. The believer is *in Christ*, as Noah was in the ark. "By faith Noah being warned "of God was moved with fear, and prepared an ark."‡ He believed the sure testimony of God, both respecting the deluge and the appointed method of preservation; he feared the impending judgment, and revered the justice and power of God; and thus he was moved to follow his directions. To prepare the ark was a vast undertaking: his labour and expence must have been exceedingly great, and his perseverance, amidst the scorn and hatred of an unbelieving world, most exemplary.—But when the deluge came, he was found *in the ark*, and preserved to be the progenitor of a new race of men; and even of the promised Re-

* 1 Cor. xii. 12—31. † Gal. ii. 20. Col. iii. 3, 4.
‡ Heb. xi. 7. 1 Pet. iii. 20.

deemer, on whom doubtless his faith had ultimately been placed: while all the rest of the human species, however distinguished, or to whatever refuges they fled, were swept away with one common desolation. But had he bestowed as much pains and expence, in building a lofty tower on a high mountain, following the dictates of his own wisdom; he would have shared the common doom; as they will, who "go about to "establish their own righteousness," instead of diligently seeking the salvation of God. For like Noah, the sinner, hearing of "the wrath of God revealed "from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighte-"ousness of men," believing the divine record "is "moved with fear," and takes warning to flee from the wrath to come. He hears also of Christ, the true Ark, which God himself hath provided; and renouncing all other confidences, by faith he betakes himself to this sure refuge, applies for admission, and endures the self-denial, contempt, and persecution to which this may expose him. And whatever difficulties he may now encounter; his wisdom will be acknowledged and his felicity envied, when no unbeliever shall find any shelter from the overwhelming deluge of divine vengeance, which perhaps he now despises or blasphemes.

Under the Mosaick dispensation, the *guiltless* manslayer was exposed to the sword of the avenger of blood: but cities of refuge were provided, to which he might flee for shelter.—Yet in this perilous situation an Israelite had no choice: he must scarcely turn back to take his clothes, and by no means go home to bid farewell to his dearest relatives: he must leave all

his outward comforts, employments, and interests: he must flee without delay, and hardly stop for necessary refreshment: he must not yield to indolence, or sit down when weary; and could never think of loitering, to interfere with other men's business, to examine curiosities, or to join in vain diversions. With all speed he must urge his course to the city of refuge; as if he had seen the avenger of blood with a drawn sword close behind, and heard him uttering most dreadful menaces. When he had gained the appointed asylum, he was required to abide there, at a distance from all his connexions, those excepted who chose to follow him; and this restriction continued, till the death of the high-priest set him at liberty from his confinement.

Thus the sinner, perceiving himself exposed to the wrath of God and the curse of his violated law, must "flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before him" in the gospel. Without delay he must diligently use all the means of grace, and separate from the vain pursuits and pleasures of an unbelieving world. He must not give "sleep to his eyes or slumber to his "eye-lids; but flee as a bird from the snare of the "fowler, and as a roe from the hand of the hunter." He must "work out his own salvation with fear and "trembling," and earnestly apply for an interest in the great atonement; knowing that if death should previously overtake him, the avenging justice of God would prove the ruin of his immortal soul. And when he hath obtained a good hope of his acceptance, he must still keep close to this refuge: renouncing the society of all those, that refuse to join with him

in his new course of life; remembering that "if any "man love father, or mother, wife, or children, more "than Christ, he cannot be his disciple."

Thus the true believer is *in Christ*, as in the city of refuge: and if we do not wish to deceive ourselves, we may know whether our experience, conduct, and confidence bear any resemblance to this representation; and whether we desire to join the apostle in saying, "Yea doubtless, I count all things but loss, for "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my "Lord:—I count them but dung, that I may win "Christ, and be found *in him*, not having mine own "righteousness which is of the law; but that which "is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness "which is of God by faith."*

He, that is thus in Christ is finally delivered from condemnation; all his sins are blotted out and buried in the depths of the sea; "Being justified by faith he "hath peace with God;" to whom being reconciled when an enemy "by the death of his Son, he shall be "saved by his life." He is admitted into a covenant of friendship with the everlasting God, and adopted into his family as a son and heir. "All things shall "work together for his good," and "nothing shall "separate him from the love of Christ." All the promises without exception belong to him, and shall be fulfilled in due season and order; "for," says the apostle, "all things are your's, and ye are Christ's, "and Christ is God's."—We consider, then,

* Phil. iii. 8, 9.

II. The inward change, which every real christian has experienced. "He is a new creature."

Whether any one were previously a Jew or a gentile; whether we were moral, civil, learned, ingenious, devout, zealous, or superstitious and enthusiastical, a sceptical reasoner, or a scoffing infidel; when he becomes a christian, "he is a new creature."—"We "are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto "good works, which God hath before ordained that "we should walk in them." "For in Christ Jesus "neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncir-"cumcision, but a new creature."* What are we then to understand by these energetick expressions?—Will any sensible man maintain, that a new creed or name may properly be called a new creation? Will he affirm that nothing more was meant than a decent moral conduct, or an external reformation? Does this amount to any thing more than the cleansing of the outside, while the heart remains full of pollution? Such frigid interpretations must be merely the word of man; for "the word of God is quick and "powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword; pierc-"ing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, "and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of "the thoughts and intents of the heart."†

It is, however, proper to observe, that he, who is a new creature, continues, in many respects, the same as before. His body with all its members and senses is the same; though he finds himself disposed to make a new use of them: his soul and all his faculties are the same, though his judgment and affections are en-

* Gal. vi. 15. Eph. ii. 10. † Jer. xxiii. 29. Heb. iv. 12.

tirely changed. He possesses his former measure of capacity and learning, with the peculiarity of his genius and the original complexion of his mind. The man of enlarged powers does not lose that superiority of talent; while he is content to be thought a fool for Christ's sake, to seek wisdom from him with the teachableness of a little child, and to devote all his endowments to the glory of the Giver. The man of slender abilities and illiterate education, makes no advances in learning or ingenuity, except as he becomes of "good understanding in the way of godliness." No alteration takes place in any person's relative situation or rank in society: he can claim no additional civil immunities or advancement, when he is "in Christ "a new creature:" nor does he forfeit any of his rights; though persecution may deprive him of them, and love of Christ make him willing to renounce them.—In general he abides in his calling, if lawful; but endeavours to fill it up in a new manner.

What then is especially intended?—Here again the scripture assists our enquiry by apt illustrations. "Ye were," says the apostle, "the servants of sin, "but ye obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, "which was delivered you."* Learned men generally agree, that the concluding words would be more exactly rendered, *into which ye were delivered;* alluding to the mould into which melted metal is poured, that it may thence take it's intended fashion and impression. When vessels of silver have been thus formed again; they are as really *new*, as if the metal

* Rom. vi. 17.

had just been brought from the mine. Thus sinners are in themselves, "vessels of wrath fitted for de-"struction," bearing the image of fallen Adam, and disposed to imitate his rebellion and apostacy: but the new creation forms them into "vessels of mercy, "prepared for glory," stamped with the image of Christ, "fitted for their Master's use, and ready for "every good work." They are the same men, yet new creatures.

The grafted tree also is in many respects the same as before: yet it is a new tree, and as the poet beautifully expresses it,

Miraturque novas frondes, et non sua poma.

'It wonders at its new leaves, and fruit that is not its 'own.'—Thus when the word of truth is engrafted in the heart by the Holy Spirit, the same man becomes a new creature, and his thoughts, words, and actions also become new.

The scriptural emblems of sinners, according to their different propensities, are taken from lions, tigers, foxes, swine, serpents, and other fierce, crafty, ravenous, or filthy animals: but a sheep or a dove is the emblem of a Christian; and the new creation affects this marvellous change. "The wolf also shall dwell "with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with "the kid, and the calf, the young lion and the fatling "together; and a little child shall lead them. And "the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones "shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw "like the ox: and the suckling child shall play on the "hole of the asp; and the weaned child shall put his

"hand on the cockatrice den: they shall not hurt nor "destroy in all my holy mountain."* Does not every man perceive, that if Almighty God should dispose these animals to live together in perfect amity, as here described, they would be *new creatures;* though the same outward form, and many other peculiarities of each species should remain? And who can deny, that if the grace of God so change the ambitious, rapacious, covetous, fraudulent, contentious, revengeful, cruel, sensual, and profane; that they willingly live together, "in all the commandments and ordi- "nances of the Lord blameless," they are to all religious purposes new creatures?

Let any considerate and impartial man compare the character and spirit of St. Paul, before and after his conversion; and determine for himself, whether the apostle was not a new creature. His body and soul, his abilities and ardent turn of mind, continued the same; but, in other respects, he differed as much from his former self, as from any other man in the world. The change would probably appear as remarkable, in the case of Matthew, Zaccheus, or Onesimus, had we as copious an account of them, as we have of the apostle.—Nay, the thief upon the cross, gave evident proofs, that the tree was made good; for the fruit began to be good, and would doubtless have been abundant had his life been spared.—Even when a man's outward conduct has been irreproachable, the internal change in his views, purposes, and desires, is clearly manifest

* Is. xi. 6—9.

to his own mind, though the effects be less visible to others.

The various metaphors, in which this new creation is spoken of in scripture, confirm this explanation. "A new heart, will I give you, and a new spirit "will I put within you," saith the Lord.* But reformation, without an inward change of disposition, would be a mere counterfeit of the promised blessing.—"Ye must be born again."—"Blessed be God "who hath begotten us again to a lively hope.†" The allusion is made, in this common scriptural language, to the production of a creature, which before had no separate existence, but now possesses life, has capacities of action and enjoyment, wants nourishment, and may be expected to grow to maturity: and it is the invariable rule of nature, that the offspring bears the image and inherits the propensities of the parent animal. The emphatical meaning of "being "born again," "born of the Spirit," "born of God," must be very manifest: and had our Lord only intended an outward ordinance or reformation, when he said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except ye be "born again, ye cannot see the kingdom of God;" it could not have been denied, that he had perplexed a plain subject by a needless obscurity of expression.

"You hath he quickened," saith the apostle, who "were dead in trespasses and sins." Man, as the Lord created him, possessed animal life and its propensities; as a rational creature, he was capable of ac-

* Ezek. xi. 19, 20. xxxvi. 25—27.
† John, iii. 1—8 1 Pet. i. 3, 23.

tions and enjoyments of a higher order; and as *spiritual* he was capable of finding happiness in the love and service of God: but he has lost his *spiritual* life and is *dead in sin*. Fallen angels possess the powers of reason to a very great degree: yet they are *spiritually dead;* they are incapable of loving and enjoying God, and finding happiness in his holy service: and, I am persuaded that sober reflection will convince any candid enquirer, that the most rational man living is, while unregenerate, as incapable of the pleasures angels enjoy in heaven, as animals are of sharing the satisfactions of the philosopher. This appears in one remarkable circumstance: when any person renounces all other pursuits for the sake of religion, it is always supposed that he leads a joyless life, and is in danger of becoming melancholy; as if the felicity of "angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect," were wholly unsuited to man's nature on earth, and incapable of affording him delight!

The same internal renovation is called "the circum-" cision of the heart to love the Lord;" and described under the image of "putting his law in the *heart*, and "writing it in the *inward* parts." "For the grace "of God which bringeth salvation, teaches us to de-"ny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live so-"berly, righteously, and godly in this present world."

This change begins that "renewing in the spirit of "our mind," the "transformation by the renewing "of our mind" "the putting off the old man," and "the putting on the new man;" for these expressions relate to the growth of the new creature, and the removal of every thing that retards it. So that *regene-*

ration is the beginning of *sanctification*, which signifies the *making of that person or thing holy, which was before unholy.*

We cannot however, fully explain or even comprehend *the manner*, in which the new nature is communicated. In general we may observe, that as natural life subsists in every part of the animal; so spiritual life pervades all the faculties of the soul. It is light, knowledge, and judgment in the understanding; sensibility in the conscience; purity, spirituality, and fervour in the affections, and submission in the will: and this entire inward revolution produces proportionable effects upon the whole conduct and character of the real Christian. But this will appear more distinctly, while,

III. We consider the effects of the change, "Old "things are passed away; behold, all things are be- "come new."

This language is general, and no exceptions are intimated.—He who hath thus "passed from death "unto life," will find that his old sentiments and thoughts are vanished. His high opinion of himself, of his abilities, actions, and heart are no more; he ceases to shine in his own eyes, and gradually discovers that he is "wretched, poor, miserable, blind, and "naked;" he is constrained to renounce all dependence on his wisdom and righteousness, to distrust his own heart as "deceitful and desperately wicked," and to abhor himself as a guilty polluted criminal. Nor can he ever again recover those lofty thoughts of himself, which once were natural to him.

His hard thoughts of the divine law, as unreason-

ably strict and severe, are passed away: and he can no longer entertain his former palliating notions concerning the evil of sin. He perceives the commandment to be holy, just, and good; and the transgression of it to be replete with ingratitude, rebellion, and contempt of God. He dares no longer impeach the divine justice and goodness, in respect of the punishments denounced against sinners: his old thoughts and reasonings on these subjects are gone, and he is astonished at his own presumption, in having formerly indulged them.

His sentiments concerning the happiness to be enjoyed in worldly pleasures, and the gloom and melancholy of a religious life, are wholly changed. He can no longer think of eternity as uncertain or distant: and no temptation or discouragement can henceforth prevail with him, to give up his hope of everlasting life, to rest satisfied with a portion in this world, or to risk the tremendous consequences. "He looks "not at the things which are seen, but at the things "which are not seen: for the things which are seen "are temporal, but the things which are not seen are "eternal.

His former thoughts of Christ and his salvation are passed away. He once despised the glorious Redeemer in his heart; perhaps he deemed those to be hypocrites or enthusiasts, who spoke in animated language of his love and preciousness: but these imaginations are no more; he is now ready to exclaim, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!" He counts all but lost for Christ, and fears exceedingly coming short of his salvation. He cannot think

meanly of him, or be indifferent to his favour, cause, or glory; yet he continues dissatisfied with the degree of his admiring love and gratitude to his great Benefactor.—His former opinions concerning the wise and happy among the sons of men are irrecoverably gone. He pities the very persons, whom he once admired or envied; and counts the despised and afflicted disciples of Christ "the excellent of the earth, in whom "is all his delight." He longs to share their privileges and felicity: nor could he recover his former aversion to them, even if he supposed that he should be for ever excluded from their company.

When any one is in Christ a new creature, his old pursuits and pleasures also pass away.—As the man of business has done with the pastimes of childhood: so the believer ceases to relish those scenes of dissipated or sensual indulgence, which once were his element. He finds himself uneasy, when they come in his way: not only deeming them a criminal waste of time and money, and a wilful hindrance to serious reflection; but feeling them to be a chasm in his enjoyment, and an interruption to his comfort, in communion with God, and the company of his servants.

His conduct is still more decided in things directly evil; "How shall he that is dead to sin live any longer "therein?". He hates and dreads sin as his worst enemy: "His seed remaineth in him, that he cannot sin, "because he is born of God." He does not indeed forsake his lawful employments; but he gradually learns to follow them from new motives, and in a new manner; not from covetousness or on worldly princi-

ples, but as his duty, from love to God and man, and according to the precepts of the sacred scriptures.

It will readily be perceived, that the old companions of such a man will pass away. Even when relative duties and other causes render some intercourse with ungodly persons unavoidable, it will become less cordial and intimate. When such opposite characters meet, one of them must be out of his element: all those associates therefore of the new convert's former years, who have no interest in continuing the acquaintance, will drop off, as leaves from the trees in autumn: and he will find that the society of his most agreeable old companions is become irksome; for they seem far more profane and frivolous than they used to be.

Time would fail, should we particularly consider how the new convert's former discourse is passed away: and how his idle, slanderous, profane, or perhaps polluting, words are exchanged for such as are pure, peaceable, and edifying.* And it is almost needless to state, that his old course of behaviour also is finally renounced. The particulars that have been mentioned, may serve for a specimen: and it should be remembered, that in every respect in which "old "things pass away, all things become new," the apostle, by inserting the word *behold*, hath emphatically demanded our attention to this circumstance!

This too might be illustrated, by considering the various operations of the believer's mind, and the objects of his affections. He hopes and fears, grieves

* Eph. iv. 29. v. 4. Col. iv. 6. Jam. i. 26. iii.

and rejoices, desires and hates, in a new manner; and his passions have respect to new objects. He fears the wrath and frown of God; he hopes for glory and immortality; he mourns for his own sins, and the miseries of other men; he rejoices in God, hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and abhors that which is evil. His judgment and taste are gradually formed upon God's word; his memory is replenished with divine truths, and his imagination employed in realizing invisible things. The company of his choice, the places of his willing resort, the books he prefers, his select topicks of discourse, the use he makes of his time and talents, the manner in which he conducts business, and enjoys the comforts of life, might be enlarged upon, to shew in what respects "all things "are become new." For the real Christian desires, that "whether he eat or drink, or whatsoever he do, "he may do all to the glory of God."

The extent of the apostles' meaning may, however, be further illustrated, by shewing that the believer does the same things in a new manner, in respect of the *best part* of his former conduct, and *the worst* of his present.—He used perhaps to attend on religious ordinances: and though his heart was not engaged, nor his profession sincere; he returned home well satisfied with having done his duty, or elated with an idea of his own goodness. But now, when his prayers and praises are the language of his habitual judgment and desires, and he is upon the whole a spiritual worshipper; he is continually humbled for the unallowed defects and evils of his services, and seeks to have all washed in the atoning blood of Christ.

On the other hand, it must be allowed that sin dwelleth even in the true convert; and he may possibly fall into the same evil, in which he once habitually indulged with little remorse. But in this case he is filled with anguish; he deeply abases himself before God, confesses his guilt, deprecates deserved wrath, submits to sharp correction, craves forgiveness, and "prays to be restored to the joy of God's salvation, "and upheld by his free spirit." Even in these respects "all things are become new."

In short, the proposition is universal: and the true believer, in all things acts from new motives, by a new rule, and to accomplish far other purposes, than he formerly had in view. But the more particular examination of the subject must be left to your private meditations, while we conclude at present with a brief application.

There are persons professing to be Christians, who avowedly disregard this subject; and if we speak of regeneration or the new creature, are ready to answer, "How can these things be?" or perhaps to retort an indiscriminate charge of enthusiasm. But do you intend to answer your Judge in this manner? Do you expect to enter heaven, by disproving the truth of his most solemn and repeated declarations? Is *your* judgment the standard of truth? Can nothing be needful to salvation, which *you* do not experience? If God be indeed glorious in holiness: if the society and joys of heaven be holy, and if man be unholy, an entire change must, in the very nature of things, take place, before he can possibly delight in God, or enjoy heaven, were there no other obstacle to his salvation.

Let me therefore earnestly beseech you to reconsider the subject: let me prevail with you to search the scriptures, and to beg of God to shew you the true meaning of them; and to grant, that if these things be indeed true and needful, you may know them by your own happy experience.

Again, some religious people profess to *know* that their sins are forgiven, and others are anxious to obtain this assurance. If then it be asked, how can any man be thus certain in this matter? I answer, by a consciousness, that "he is in Christ a new creature, "that old things are passed away, and all things are "become new." When our Lord forgave the sins of the paralytick, he enabled him to carry his bed; this proved his sins forgiven, both to himself and others. And in like manner, when we know that, in consequence of having applied to Christ for salvation, we abhor all sin, love the ways of God, and delight in pious company; we have a witness in ourselves, and the testimony of God in his word, that we partake of the gift of righteousness by faith. The clearer this evidence of our new creation appears, the fuller ground of assurance we possess: we are therefore exhorted, "to give all diligence to make our calling and "election sure:" but, without this, all impressions and supposed revelations, declaring our sins to be pardoned, are manifest delusions; for they contradict the express testimony of God in his holy word.

Too many profess the gospel, who give no evidence of this gracious change, and stumble others by their unholy lives: but the text at once cuts off such men's pretensions; and the reproach ought to rest on them-

selves, and not on the holy doctrines which they disgrace.

But, as "the path of the just shineth more and "more unto the perfect day," I would earnestly and affectionately caution the serious enquirer, not to undervalue feeble beginnings; but to take encouragement from them to press forward, in the diligent use of the means of grace; that the change may be rendered more evident, and that he may "abound in "hope by the power of the holy Ghost."

Let discouraged souls likewise, who feel sin to be their burden, grief, and terror, and who are ready to say to the Saviour, "Lord, to whom shall I go? thou "hast the words of eternal life:" let such fainting, and feeble minded believers, learn to derive encouragement from their very fears, jealousies, sighs, groans, and tears, because "of the sin that dwelleth in them;" and "because they cannot do the things that they "would:" for these are, without doubt, effects and evidences of the new creation.

Finally, my brethren, if you can rejoice in the assurance, that you are partakers of these inestimable benefits; shew your gratitude to God, by endeavouring to communicate the same blessings to your fellow sinners: knowing that his mercy and grace are sufficient for them also; that he makes use of reconciled enemies, as instruments in reconciling others also to himself; and that he preserves them in life especially for this most gracious purpose.

SERMON VII.

PSALM ii. 12.

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little: blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

WHATEVER were the immediate occasion of this psalm, it evidently contains a most remarkable prophecy concerning Christ, and the divine vengeance to be inflicted on those who opposed the establishment of his kingdom. The Jews were the peculiar objects of the threatened indignation; and they are also the witnesses of the authenticity of those scriptures, in which the prophecy is contained: for by them the old Testament has been preserved; and they now unanimously attest that the psalm before us was written at least a thousand years before Jesus of Nazareth was born.

It may therefore, be useful in the first place to call your attention, to this remarkable prophecy of things already accomplished, or hastening to an accomplishment.—"Why do the heathen rage, and the people

"imagine a vain thing! The kings of the earth stand "up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the "Lord, and against his anointed," Let us hear the apostles' application of this passage: "for of a truth "against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anoint- "ed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gen- "tiles and the people of Israel, were gathered toge- "ther, to do *whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel de- "termined before to be done.*"* These concluding words are well worthy of our notice: as they illustrate the plan of divine providence in the government of the world. We are apt to wonder that wicked men should be permitted to triumph as they often do: not considering that the Lord employs even rebels to fulfil his righteous purposes; and that, contrary to their own intention, they are made the executioners of his vengeance, or used as his chastening rod. Even atheists and infidels, yea, the haughtiest and most self-willed of his enemies, are permitted to prosper, till they have inflicted condign punishment on sinners, perhaps less criminal than themselves, and then they are consigned to more tremendous vengeance.—Nay, the Lord even makes use of wicked men to accomplish his designs of mercy to the church. Thus the Jewish rulers and priests, with Herod, Pilate, and the people of Israel, though before at enmity with each other, combined together against the Saviour of the world: they thought evil against him and his church, "but the Lord meant it for good†." And they could

* Acts, iv. 25—28.
† Gen. l. 20.

only do what "his hand and counsel had determined "before to be done."

"The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers "took counsel together against the Lord, and against "his anointed," or his Messiah; saying, "Let us "break his bonds asunder, and cast away his cords "from us." All the power and policy of man seemed to be leagued together, with a fixed determination to destroy Jesus and extirpate his doctrine. His numerous and formidable enemies unanimously resolved that "they would not have this man to reign over "them." The priests and rulers excited the people to demand his crucifixion, with unrelenting vehemence. They aimed to blot out the remembrance of him and his spiritual dominion from the earth, that they might have no authority but that of the magistrate. "We have no king but Cæsar, whosoever "maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar." Observe, my brethren, what was their principal objection to the religion of Jesus, and whence it arose. They hated the law and government of God; and therefore they rebelled against the kingdom and authority of his Son. Thus men still reject the gospel, because it magnifies and honours the law and justice of God, condemns all their former transgressions, and with the proposal of a gracious pardon, implies an obligation to obedience in future; and in this respect the same part is acted over and over again, from generation to generation.

But mark what follows: "He that sitteth in the "heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in de-"rision:" He looks down with contempt and disdain

upon their puny attempts to subvert his kingdom and counteract his sovereign purposes.—" Then shall he " speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his " sore displeasure." Let us see how this prophecy was fulfilled. The Jews crucified the Lord Jesus for declaring that he was the promised Messiah, the Son of God. But, behold, he demonstrates himself to be that glorious Redeemer! He dies indeed, but he rises from the dead, ascends into heaven, takes possession of his exalted throne, and sends forth his Spirit upon his apostles, that they may be empowered to establish his religion in the world. The Jewish rulers and people, however, having blasphemed his miracles, and condemned him to the cross, persist in their enmity, oppose his ambassadors, and persecute his harmless disciples.—But what is the consequence? The gospel rapidly gains ground; persecution drives believers into remote regions, to convey the glad tidings to mankind; the dying martyrs, confirming their testimony by their harmless lives and patient sufferings, shew the excellency of their principles, and expose the odious cruelty of their adversaries. At length the day of vengeance arrives: he that sitteth in the heavens had poured contempt upon his impotent foes, and triumphed gloriously, notwithstanding their feeble, though determined opposition; but now " he speaks " to them in his wrath, and vexes them in his sore " displeasure." Jerusalem is surrounded by the Roman legions, the executioners of the sentence which had been pronounced: miseries till then unknown are inflicted on the devoted nation; eleven hundred thousand persons perish in the siege; the survivors are sold

for slaves, till no more purchasers can be found; the city and temple are entirely destroyed, and the sacred hill of Zion given up, to be henceforth "trodden un-"der foot of the gentiles," according to another memorable prophecy, which hath now been fulfilling for nearly one thousand eight hundred years!* An apostate emperor attempts, in defiance of Christ, to rebuild the temple and restore the Jews; but his design is frustrated by earthquakes and the signal interposition of heaven: while the Jews themselves, scattered through all nations, and almost every where oppressed, are reluctant witnesses to the truth of the scriptures, and monuments of divine vengeance on the despisers of the gospel.

The Roman emperors also exerted their extensive and absolute authority in opposing the establishment of Christianity; and it is remarkable, that several of those, who are celebrated for *virtue*, were the most determined persecutors.—But what was the event? From that time this mighty empire was undermined, and at length Christianity was established, as it were, upon its ruins!

It would not be a difficult task to shew, from the history of succeeding ages, that God hath fulfilled his promise, in maintaining his church against the most virulent rage of her numerous and powerful enemies; according to the next words of this prophecy, "Yet "have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion:" and the event will be the same with all other rulers

* Luke, xxi. 24.

and nations, who set themselves to oppose the kingdom of Christ.—For a season they may prosper, boast, and blaspheme; and say, with Sennacherib, to the servants of the Lord, "Let not your God in whom "you trust deceive you, saying, Ye shall not be de- "livered into my hands—Behold, ye have heard what "I have done unto all lands, and shall ye be deliver- "ed?"—But God will answer them, as he did the proud Assyrian, "I know thy abode, and thy going "out and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. "Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult is come "up into my ears; therefore I will put my hook in "thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips; and I will turn "thee back by the way by which thou camest.—The "zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this;"* for he hath said, and he will accomplish it, "Yet have I set "my King upon my holy hill of Zion."

But the prophecy still further expands itself: "I "will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me; "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. "Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for "thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the "earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them "with a rod of iron, thou shalt dash them in pieces "like a potter's vessel. Be wise now, therefore, O "ye kings, be instructed, ye judges of the earth." The counsel is addressed to kings, because monarchy was the more general kind of dominion: but all invested with authority are evidently meant, by whatever titles they may be distinguished. They are the

* Is. xxxvii. 10, 11, 28—38.

judges of the earth, whose judgment is submitted to in all the secular concerns of mankind. These dignified personages are admonished to be wise, and welcome instruction; especially in respect of the kingdom, which the Lord hath established under the government of his only begotten Son.—It therefore follows, "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with "trembling."

'Submit to the authority of God; bow your sceptres to the sceptre of the Messiah: employ your 'power and influence in obeying his commands and 'promoting his glory: presume not, in any case, to 'set your authority in opposition to his; lest he dash 'you in pieces like a potter's vessel. Stand in awe 'of his power, reverence his majesty; and, while you 'rejoice in your exalted rank, and all its alluring appendages; tremble also, lest they should occasion 'your deeper condemnation.'—"Kiss the Son, lest "he be angry, and ye perish from the way: when his "wrath is kindled, yea, but a little; blessed are all "they that put their trust in him."

The conclusion of the psalm is very emphatical: and the turn given to the address may imply far more than is expressed, with a trivial change in the punctuation. This is frequently the manner of the sacred writers. "How shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great "salvation?" "What is a man profited, if he gain "the whole world, and lose his own soul?"—The psalmist having said, "When his wrath is kindled, "yea, but a little," breaks off abruptly, as if he meant to add, 'I will not, I cannot describe the misery of 'that man, against whom the wrath of Christ is kin-

'dled in the least degree: I leave the subject as too 'dreadful to be insisted on; and will rather direct 'your thoughts to a more delightful consideration;' "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

Having thus briefly reviewed this prophecy, I will again demand your attention to its contents, which are too obvious to need much interpretation, and which involve no ambiguity or uncertainty. Have not these predictions, concerning the opposition of the world to the kingdom of Christ, and his triumph over his enemies, been exactly fulfilled? Have not facts corresponded with the evident meaning of the language here used?

These accomplishments of scripture, in things which no human sagacity could possibly foresee, are unequivocal demonstrations that it is the word of the omniscient God. Ingenious men may easily start plausible objections, or answer arguments with sarcasm, or repartee: but is this a suitable way of treating subjects of such awful importance? Let the opposers of our holy religion stand forth with manly frankness, and fairly prove, if they can, that these prophecies were not delivered a thousand years before the coming of Christ; or else that the events have not corresponded to them. Until one of these things has been undeniably effected; we shall continue to affirm, that so far from believing without evidence, we have unspeakably better reasons to assign for our faith and hope, than unbelievers can have for any of their opinions.

For my own part, after a diligent examination of the subject, during many years, I am fully convinced

that the Bible is the infallible word of God; and am thankful, that I did not imbibe this sentiment from education or early prejudices, but that it has been the result of a most hesitating investigation: because this gives me a confidence, not easily to be shaken, that the gospel will maintain its ground, though all the genius, learning, eloquence, and authority of the whole world should unite against it. Nay, I am assured, that it will survive the ruin of all its enemies, who can only destroy themselves: for they can neither prevent its progress and triumphs, nor hinder the salvation of the meanest believer; but will at length, find, that "it "is hard to kick against the pricks."—The remainder of the present discourse will contain a more particular consideration of the text, in the following method.

I. We will enquire into the special nature of that kingdom, which God hath determined to establish;

II. Notice the exhortation of the text; "Kiss "the Son, lest he be angry."

III. Make some remarks on the warning and encouragement, "If his wrath be kindled, yea, "but a little; blessed are all they that put their "trust in him."

I. Then, we consider the special nature of the Messiah's kingdom. "Yet have I set my King up-"on my holy hill of Zion." This was the purpose of God, even when he created the world. He formed the earth to be a theatre, on which he might display his essential glory: and the person, salvation, and kingdom of Emmanuel, constitute the grandest exhi-

bition of all the mysteries and perfections of the divine nature that hath ever been made. All the dispensations of providence have been arranged, in subserviency to the same great design; as it must be evident to all who carefully study the history of the Old Testament, or indeed the history of the world in every age.

When therefore the tempter had prevailed on our first parents to violate the Creator's prohibition, the promise of a Saviour was immediately given: "The "Seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head:" 'The Messiah shall overturn the usurped dominion 'of the devil, and set up his kingdom on the ruins of 'it; to the final confusion and destruction of that great 'ringleader in rebellion against God.'—The Messiah, as the Head of this kingdom, was foretold in the law of Moses, and by the prophets, who "spake of the suffer-"ings of Christ and the glory that should follow."* This was the Stone seen in vision by Nebuchadnezzar; which was "cut out of the mountain without hands," and having destroyed all opposition, "became a great "mountain, and filled the whole earth."†

In the fulness of time the promised Saviour appears: and his messenger goes before him, proclaiming as a herald, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at "hand."—Now the ancient prophecies are fulfilled; "The blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, and the "dead are raised." "Behold a voice from heaven, "saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am "well pleased; hear ye him." He leads a lowly and

* 1 Pet. i. 10—12. † Dan. ii. 31—48.

suffering life: he goes about doing good: his most beneficent doctrine is confirmed by benign miracles of the most stupendous nature: all his words and works are stamped with divine wisdom, holiness, love, and power. Yet is he "despised and rejected of men." He dies a spotless sacrifice upon the cross; numbered with malefactors, and treated with extreme contempt, malice, and cruelty. He rises from the dead a glorious Conqueror, "ascends up on high, leading captivity captive, and receiving gifts for men; yea, for "the rebellious also, that the Lord God may dwell "among them."* Now "he receives to himself a "kingdom," "All power in heaven and earth is "given to him:" "angels, principalities, and powers, are made subject to him; and he is made Head "over all things to his church!" His apostles having received the promise of the Spirit from on high, go forth every where preaching the gospel, and declaring that "the same Jesus," whom the Jews had crucified, "is exalted to be a prince and a Saviour, "to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of "sins:" "That there is no salvation in any other; "for there is none other name under heaven given "unto men, whereby we must be saved;" while the miraculous powers which they display and communicate, confirm their testimony and command attention. Their formidable persecutors are confounded, thousands and tens of thousands embrace the religion of the crucified Jesus; till Jewish infidelity, and pagan idolatry, and all the power and policy with which they

* Ps. lxviii. 18.

are supported, fall down before it; as the image in Nebuchadnezzar's vision before the Stone cut out of the mountain without hands.

In this manner JEHOVAH attested the despised Jesus to be his well-beloved Son; thus, as it were, addressing the Jews, 'Ye have crucified the Lord of 'glory, because he said I am the Son of God; but be-'hold I have raised him from the dead! I have exalt-'ed him at my right hand in heavenly places,' "I have "set my King upon my holy hill of Zion," 'accord-'ing to my ancient predictions. Now the whole earth 'shall be his inheritance, whatever obstacles or ene-'mies may oppose him. I have undertaken and I will 'accomplish it: all men shall either bow to the scep-'tre of his grace, and become his willing subjects 'and redeemed people; or they shall be crushed as 'obstinate rebels under his feet. This is the deter-'mination of the Lord of Hosts.'

A mistaken idea of Christianity seems in this respect to be very prevalent. Numbers imagine, that it may be very well to believe the gospel, but that there is no *necessity* of so doing; as others may be safe and happy upon their own plans. But the scripture uses a very different language: Christianity is there considered as the only true religion, and faith in Christ the only way of being saved. This is no unessential matter, in which men may safely embrace opposite opinions: every man who reverences the Bible as the word of God, must own, that no unbeliever can escape final condemnation: for the Lord himself hath repeatedly attested it; and "he that believeth "not hath made him a liar." Let it also be observ-

ed, that even the adorable Saviour himself, the great object of our faith, is constituted our Judge: and it is never intimated, that in the decisive hour, he will make any exception in favour of the mighty monarch, the renowned warrior, the busy politician or tradesman, the learned sceptick, or the indolent and inconsiderate trifler. "He that believeth not shall be damn-"ed." One distinction will then swallow up all others: the faithful disciple will sit down with him upon his throne; and all unbelievers will be "punish-"ed with an everlasting destruction from his pre-"sence."

The kingdom of Christ is administered by him in the character of a Mediator. As soon as sin entered into the world, the Lord made known his purpose of dealing with men, through the intervention of a Peacemaker; in whose person as Emmanuel, and through whose obedience unto the death of the cross, he might honourably shew mercy to the transgressors of his holy law. So that they who oppose his kingdom, not only rebel against the authority of God, but despise the riches of his everlasting mercy. To effect our reconciliation to our offended Creator, the eternal Son of God was made partaker of flesh and blood; and having "suffered once for sins, the just for the un-"just, that he might bring us to God;" he is now ascended into the heavens, as our merciful and faithful High-priest and Advocate. "The government is "upon his shoulders," that he might be "able to save to the uttermost all those that come to God through him." Angels, principalities, and powers obey and adore him. "He has the keys of death

"and hell;" He is "King of kings, and Lord of lords." The kingdom of nature and providence is administered by him as our Brother and Friend: "All judgment "is committed to him;" "all the fulness of the God-"head dwells in him bodily." He is the Head of all things to his church, "the fulness of him that filleth "all in all."

How astonishing is this language! how stupendous his grace; who, from this height of personal and mediatorial dignity and pre-eminence, looks down in compassion on us sinful worms, and seems only to glory in his power, as it enables him to enrich and bless our guilty souls! He reigns upon a mercy-seat, dispensing pardons and gifts to rebellious men, pardons and gifts, which he purchased for them with his own blood! He proclaims his immeasurable love in the blessed gospel; he sends his Holy Spirit to glorify him in our hearts, receiving of those things which belong to him, and shewing them to us, in all their suitableness and inestimable value. He invites all that will, to come and take of these blessings freely; he casts out none that come; and he confers all things pertaining to life and godliness on every waiting soul. With the highest propriety therefore, angel's celebrated the Redeemer's birth in that expressive song of praise, "Glory to "God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will "towards men;" for "God sent not his Son into the "world to condemn the world; but that the world "through him might be saved." Yet, if men "re-"fuse him that speaketh;" if they "despise his coun-"sel, and will none of his reproof:", he will most certainly glorify his power in their destruction. "God "hath given him a name which is above every name;

" that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow;— " and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus " Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." This agrees with the solemn declaration quoted by the apostle, " As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall " bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."*

Let it be likewise observed, that " the yoke of " Christ is easy, and his burden light." Not only are all his subjects made heirs of heaven; they have " also the promise of the life that now is;" the full assurance that no good thing shall be withholden from them, and they shall receive an hundred-fold, even in this present time, for all the losses they sustain from love to Christ and the gospel.

II. Then let us notice the exhortation of the text: " Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and so ye perish " from the way:" that is, ' Submit and be reconciled ' to him, before the day of vengeance overtake you.'

This implies in the first place, submission to the righteousness of God, and a humble acceptance of mercy in his appointed way. We cannot come to a Saviour, except in the character of lost sinners. We are therefore required to humble ourselves before God, and to allow the justice of his awful sentence: and we must not at all excuse our crimes, or expect deliverance from wrath, and the gift of eternal life, as in any degree our due. " Wilt thou," says JEHOVAH, " condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?"† This was precisely the case of the ancient Jews; " they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and go-

* Is. xlv. 21—25. Rom. xiv. 11. Phil. ii. 10, 11. † Job xl. 8.

"ing about to establish their own righteousness, have "not submitted themselves to the righteousness of "God." "For Christ is the end of the law for "righteousness to every one that believeth."*

There are two principal reasons of men's rejecting the gospel. In general they hate religion, and desire to live without restraint. They take pleasure in worldly objects: and if not compelled by their circumstances to labour, or engaged in covetous or ambitious pursuits; they love to spend their time and money in gratifying their own humour and inclinations: but submission to Christ is absolutely contrary to such a course of life. When, however, this seems to be in a measure got over; and men take a nearer view of Christianity; they are greatly offended at its humiliating doctrines. To come before God as dependent creatures, might be endured: but to approach him as justly condemned criminals is an intolerable degradation; especially when connected with self-denial and renunciation of their darling pursuits. A method of salvation, which paid more respect to their wisdom, learning, or other distinctions, and especially to their *virtue and goodness of heart*, would meet with a better reception. To speculate and decide as philosophers, to perform duties by their native energies and good dispositions, and to demand a reward of their distinguished piety and charity, would better suit their feelings; than to be saved by grace alone, to sit as little children at the feet of Jesus, to give the Lord the glory of every good desire, thought, word, and

* Rom. x. 3, 4.

action; to rely on the all-sufficient merits and atoning blood of the Saviour, and to receive eternal life as the gift of God in him. Yet the general tenour of Scripture requires this unreserved submission of sinners to divine justice, and reliance on free mercy and grace, as essential to salvation.

But the language under consideration, likewise demands implicit obedience to the Saviour, as the anointed King over his redeemed people, and over all worlds for their advantage. "Kiss the Son lest he "be angry, and so ye perish from the way." When Samuel anointed Saul king over Israel, he testified his cheerful and cordial acquiescence in the Lord's appointment, by the kiss of allegiance. In like manner, we are not only required to welcome the salvation of Christ with unfeigned gratitude, and to express our love by obedience in some particulars, according to our own choice or discretion: but we are called upon to submit to his authority, and yield obedience in all things; and if our repentance, faith, and love be sincere, we shall cordially render it. Our past sins will appear to us, as acts of rebellion against our Sovereign and bounteous Creator; present failures will be considered as additional provocations, which need forgiveness through the atoning blood; and our obedience, the only undeniable evidence of our repentance and conversion. We shall regard every interest or object which would draw us aside, as an idol and usurper; every contrary propensity as the remains of our old bondage; and the path of duty as true liberty, the perfection of which we shall long after with groans and tears.

But further, we are required, to "honour the Son, "even as we honour the Father that sent him."* Thus the worshippers of Baal *kissed* his image, and the idolatrous votaries of the golden calves used the same ceremony."† JEHOVAH therefore seems to say in the words of the text, 'I demand for my be-'loved Son that very adoration, which I prohibited 'and abhorred, when offered unto idols.' When our Lord had said, "I and my Father are One," the Jews accused him of making himself equal with God; and their renewed attempt to stone him, together with the immediate cause of his condemnation to the cross, proves that he neither denied nor evaded the charge. On this point, he and the Jews were at issue; for this supposed crime he suffered and died; but "he was "declared to be the Son of God with power, by his "resurrection from the dead." And he, who carefully examines the account given of the worship rendered to "the Lamb that was slain," by redeemed sinners, an innumerable multitude of angels and all creatures, as made known in vision to the apostle John, will not be able to mark any difference between it, and the adoration paid to "Him who sitteth on the "throne, and liveth for ever and ever."‡ It cannot therefore be wonderful, if the disciples of Christ on earth should be required to learn the worship of heaven, as a part of their "meetness for the inheritance "of the saints in light."—But we proceed to,

III. Make some remarks, on the warning and encouragement, "If his wrath be kindled, yea, but a

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* John v. 23. † 1 Kings xix. 18. Hos. xiii. 2. ‡ Rev. v. 6—13.

"little; blessed are all they that put their trust in "him."

What is this but a declaration, that 'If you refuse 'the salvation of Christ, reject his authority, and de- 'ny him the honour due to him, his love will be turn- 'ed into fiery indignation, and he will glorify his name 'in taking vengeance on his despisers, as well as in 'saving and blessing his humble disciples?'—With allusion to the day of judgment, it is said, "The "kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich "men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, "and every bondman, and every freeman, hid them- "selves in the dens and in the rocks of the moun- "tains: and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on "us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on "the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for "the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall "be able to stand?"* Observe the words, "*the* "*wrath of the Lamb,*" the wrath, not only of an of- fended King and Judge, but also of a despised Sa- viour. This will enhance the guilt and condemnation of those who neglect the gospel, and render their con- demnation more intolerable than that of Sodom and Go- morrah.

Our attention should be peculiarly fixed on the expression, "If his wrath be kindled, *yea, but a lit-* "*tle,*"—that is, 'Should you be found among the 'more plausible and moderate of those, who refuse 'submission to the Saviour; among those who have 'least provoked his indignation; your doom will yet

* Rev. vi. 15—17.

'be very tremendous.'—This comes home to the case of multitudes. Many persons readily express their abhorrence of the blasphemies, atheism, and other enormous crimes, which alas, have been perpetrated in a neighbouring nation; and with a latent self-flattery, they rise in their own good opinion, by comparing their conduct, with that of such daring enemies to God and his Christ. Others exclaim against those that deny our Lord's divinity, or his atonement; and they seem to feel much inward satisfaction in opposing these dangerous heresies: while some congratulate themselves, that they never scoff at religion, but always speak respectfully of its sacred truths and duties. Thus in various ways, men keep up a persuasion that they are Christians: yet if we insist upon unreserved submission to Christ, according to that view of it which hath been stated, they would perhaps acknowledge, they had not gone *so far* in religion. If they have not been avowed opponents, they have in great measure endeavoured to maintain a neutrality: but such persons should recollect that Christ hath said, "He that is not with me is against me;" so that all will be considered enemies, who are not his cordial friends and loyal subjects.—Indeed this is a general cause of men's destruction: they compare themselves with some other characters; fancy themselves better than they, quiet their consciences, and go on in the ways of sin and ungodliness.

But what consolation will it be in the day of wrath, should your condemnation be one degree less heavy, than that of your neighbours? Should you approach as near to christianity, as a man can possibly do, who

is not a true disciple of Christ, what would it avail you? Suppose you hesitate, from love to some lawful earthly comfort, which you prefer to Christ, and refuse to part with for his sake: will not that very circumstance render your feelings most exquisitely poignant, when the doom shall be pronounced against you? This cannot be too closely brought home to conscience: for it was a prevailing delusion, even at the time, when our Lord was on earth. Know therefore, whether thou art a Judas, betraying Christ for sordid lucre, under the mask of a disciple or a minister; a Pilate, "washing thine hands," by giving up his cause from fear of man, and then pretending to excuse it; a Herod, that openly insultest him, a Gallio, that carest for none of these things; or a Felix, who tremblest and stiflest thy convictions: Whether thou join the multitude that cry, "Crucify him, crucify "him; not this man, but Barabbas;" or with Agrippa, art "almost persuaded to be a Christian;" or "departest sorrowful, because thou hast great pos- "sessions:" which of these characters soever belongs to thee; know assuredly, that thou wilt perish from the right way, unless thou repent, and become a believing and obedient subject of the Lord Jesus. And what will it avail thee, that numbers will be associated in the same condemnation, or even perish in a still more tremendous manner?

But is not this harsh and uncharitable? Hear the words of Christ himself.—"Except a man deny him- "self, and take up his cross and follow me, he can- "not be my disciple." "Except he forsake all that "he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Does charity

consist in contradicting "the true and faithful Wit-"ness," yea, the all-merciful Saviour, or "in speak-"ing peace, when there is no peace?" The case is the same as it was of old.—Some daringly blaspheme and openly reject the Son of God: others use respectful language; but their actions shew, that they value the pleasures of sin, the friendship of the world, the pride of life, filthy lucre, or the praise of men, more than him and his salvation. But all such persons virtually declare, that they who, actuated by various worldly motives, concurred in nailing him to the cross, did right. None, who lived at that time, and might have heard his doctrine or witnessed his miracles, were wholly free from the guilt of his death, except the remnant of his true disciples: and none at present are wholly free from the charge of "crucifying the "Son of God afresh," who persist in neglecting his great salvation.

"Blessed then are all they that put their trust in "him." They are blessed in their present security and privileges; and they shall be blessed in their eternal inheritance. To you my brethren, who thus cordially welcome the Saviour, and submit to the king of Zion, with unreserved obedience and fidelity, though with many lamented imperfections; to you belong peace with God, peace of conscience, the adoption of children, and the consolations of the Holy Spirit. It is your privilege to "rejoice in hope, to be patient in "tribulations;" to find support in trials, safety in all dangers, victory over every enemy, and a rich advantage from all losses and sufferings. Whether you be rich and prosperous, or poor and afflicted; whatever be

your station or circumstances, you are blessed; for God himself hath pronounced you so: you shall be blessed through life and in death, and when the Redeemer shall appear to judge the world. "Lift up "then your heads, for your redemption draweth near:" and when others shall cry to the rocks to fall on them, and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb; you shall exclaim with triumphant exultation; "This is our "God, we have waited for him, and he will save us; "this is the Lord;— we will be glad and rejoice in his "salvation."

SERMON VIII.

1 CORINTHIANS, iv. 5.

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God.

THE manner in which the zealous, unwearied, and disinterested labours of the apostle Paul were requited from mankind, forms the most conclusive proof of human depravity; next to that arising from the contradiction, contempt, and cruelty, which his divine Master had experienced. Not only was this distinguished servant of God "every where spoken "against;" and treated as "the filth of the world, and "the offscouring of all things," by unconverted Jews and Gentiles: the whole body of Jewish converts also were exceedingly prejudiced against him; many of the churches he had planted were alienated from him; and his Corinthian converts had been so perverted by false teachers, as to entertain the most injurious sus-

picions, as to the motives of his ministerial conduct. But fervent zeal for the honour of Christ, and affectionate longing after the salvation of souls, kept him from fainting, and rendered him "stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord:" and he even submitted, with the most evident reluctance, to vindicate his character, and magnify his ministry, to the disaffected Corinthians; that, by re-establishing his apostolical authority, he might recover them from the delusions into which they had been seduced. In attempting this, he warned them against exalting some and despising others, of those who had laboured among them. "Let a man," says he, "so "account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and "stewards of the mysteries of God." All Christians are servants of Christ, and the word rendered *ministers* denotes those servants, who wait on any person, as ready at all times to execute his orders with unreserved assiduity.—But ministers are also stewards of the *mysteries* of God: they are not mere teachers of morality, but they are entrusted with the great mysteries of revealed truth, that they may declare them to mankind, as they have received them of the Lord. "Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be "found faithful." It is not necessary for ministers to be orators, courtiers, philosophers, or even men of distinguished genius or learning; but integrity and faithfulness are indispensable. Any person of common prudence would prefer a down-right honest steward, though but moderately qualified, to the most accomplished man in the world, who, he was aware, would oppress his tenants and embezzle his property.

Thus faithfulness is the grand requisite in a minister; without which, talents, however they may recommend him to the applause of men, will not procure him deliverance from the wrath of God. "But," says the apostle, "with me it is a very small thing, "that I should be judged of you, or of man's judg- "ment; yea, I judge not mine own self: for I know "nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; "but he that judgeth me is the Lord."—It must not be expected, that every one who aims to be faithful, should thus decidedly rise superior to the opinion of men, especially those within the pale of the church. At the call of duty a minister may be enabled to venture giving offence; yet do it reluctantly and be drawn into many reserves, under the notion of prudence, which may greatly impede his usefulness. Christians should therefore take heed, that they do not inadvertently tempt ministers to unfaithfulness, or render faithfulness uneasy to them. The apostle no doubt did examine his own motives and conduct; but he knew that an appeal lay from his decision to that of his heart-searching Judge; and that reflection gave rise, to the caution and warning of the text; "Therefore "judge nothing before the time until the Lord come, "who both will bring to light the hidden things of "darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of "the hearts, and then shall every man have praise of "God." Let us

I. Meditate on the coming of the Lord, and the solemnities of that awful event.

II. Consider the discoveries which will then be made.

III. Advert to the consequences of those discoveries.

I. Let us contemplate the coming of the Lord, and the solemnities of that awful event.

The sacred scriptures continually lead our thoughts to this great crisis, when the important and eternal interests of the whole human species will be finally determined. The servants of God from the beginning of the world looked forward to it: even "Enoch the "seventh from Adam prophesied of these things; "saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands "of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to "convince all that are ungodly among them, of all their "ungodly deeds, which they have committed, and of all "the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken "against him."* That profession, which Job ardently wished might be "graven with an iron pen "and lead in the rock for ever," seems to have had as much respect to the second coming of the Lord, as to his first appearance in our nature; I know that "my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the "latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin "worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see "God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes "shall behold, and not another; though my reins be "consumed within me."†

In the fiftieth psalm, which is a most poetical as well as a prophetical description of a future judgment: we have this sublime language, "Our God shall come "and shall not keep silence, a fire shall devour before

* Jude xiv. 1. † Job xix. 23, 27.

" him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about " him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and " to the earth that he may judge his people,—And " the heavens shall declare his righteousness, *for God* " *is Judge himself.* Selah."* The words of Solomon shall close these citations from the old Testament. " Rejoice, O young man in thy youth, and let thy " heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk " in the way of thine heart, and in the sight of thine " eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God " will call thee into judgment."—" For God shall " bring every work into judgment, with every secret " thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."†

In the new Testament the same subject continually demands our attention. Christians are said " to wait " for the Lord from heaven, even Jesus who delivered " us from the wrath to come," to " look for the glori- " ous appearing of the great God and our Saviour " Jesus Christ," and " to love his appearing." Thus the language of the old Testament relative to the coming of JEHOVAH, and our preparing to meet God, who is Judge himself, is applied to Christ by his apostles, without the least hesitation. And with a conscious dignity, he spake of himself, in his lowest abasement, as the Judge of the world, and the arbiter of men's eternal state. " When the Son of man shall come in " his glory, and all his holy angels with him, then " shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, and before " him shall be gathered all nations."‡

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* Psalm l. 3—6. † Eccles. xi. 9. xii. 14. ‡ Matt. xxv. 31, 32.

The coming of the Lord signifies therefore, the appearance of Christ in human nature to judge the world; when he shall exercise omnipotence, omniscience, and every divine perfection; and so "come "in his own glory" as Mediator, "and in the glory "of the Father," as sovereign Lord of all. This revelation of Jesus Christ will be visible to the whole world. "This same Jesus, which is taken up from "you into heaven, shall so come in like manner, as ye "have seen him go into heaven." "Behold, he "cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, "and they that have pierced him; and all kindreds of "the earth shall wail because of him: even so, Amen."* The man Jesus, in his glorified body, even that body which was crowned with thorns, scourged, spitted on, and nailed to the cross, will then be made visible to all men, to those who thus abused him, and to such as have in every age consented to this deed, by despising him and his salvation. He will be seen by all "who "have crucified him," as it were, again and again; as well as by them, for whom "he once suffered, the "just for the unjust, to bring them unto God."

But how immensely will his appearance, as Judge of the world, differ from that of the man of sorrows!—The mount of transfiguration, when "his counte-"nance shone as the sun, and his raiment was like "lightning;" yea, the vision of his glory, which caused his beloved disciple, who had once reclined on his bosom, in the familiarity of endeared friendship, to "fall down at his feet as dead;" can give us

* Acts, i. 11. Rev. i. 7.

but a faint idea of that divine light and majesty, with which he will be arrayed, when he shall ascend his awful tribunal. "He shall then be revealed from "heaven with his mighty angels:" *the angels of his power* and authority; the ministers of his vengeance and his love.—"At the end of the world, the Son of man "shall send forth his angels; and they shall gather out "of his kingdom all things that offend, and them "that do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace "of fire: there shall be weeping and gnashing of "teeth." "They shall see the Son of man coming "in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; "and he shall send his angels,—and they shall gather "together his elect."*—Hence it is evident that all the angels are the creatures and servants, as well as the worshippers, of the incarnate Son of God.

His coming will be announced by a summons, august and tremendous beyond description; and immediately followed by the resurrection of the dead. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with "a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the "trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise "first." "Behold I shew you a mystery! We shall "not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a mo-"ment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. "For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be "raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."—"The hour cometh, when all that are in the graves "shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that "have done good to the resurrection of life, and they

* Matt. xiii. 41—43. xxiv. 30, 31.

"that have done evil to the resurrection of damna-
"tion."* Believers will rise first, and then such of the saints as shall be alive on the earth at that time, will be changed; that "death may be swallowed up "in victory." Afterwards the multitudes of the wicked will "awake to shame and everlasting con-
"tempt."—The bodies of the unnumbered millions, who through succeeding ages have inhabited the globe, wherever laid, or however consumed, will be restored to life, and reunited to their immortal souls, that they may participate their happiness or misery. "Then the dead, small and great, shall stand before "God. The sea shall give up the dead that were in "it; and death and hell shall deliver up the dead "which were in them."†

At this important crisis, the earth and all its works, yea, the visible heavens also, shall become one general conflagration: "The heavens and earth, which "now are, by the same word are kept in store, re-
"served unto fire, against the day of judgment and "perdition of ungodly men." "The day of the "Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the "heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the "elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, "and all the works which are therein shall be burned "up."‡ Yea, "heaven and earth shall flee away, "and there shall be found no place for them."

In vain should we attempt a description of this sublime and awful scene: our faculties labour, and our

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* 1 Thess. iv. 16. 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52. John, v. 28, 29.
† Rev. xx. 13—15. ‡ 2 Pet. iii. 7, 10—12.

tongues as it were faulter, when we would think or speak of such subjects.—What then will be the feelings of the immense multitudes assembled on this occasion! What the astonishment, terror, and despair of the impenitent! of such as have idolized those things, which are the prey of all-devouring flames! of those who have blasphemed that Saviour, who appears to be their Judge! or ridiculed the divine testimony concerning the place of torment, and those evil spirits which are ready to seize upon them! Let us then recollect, that *we* shall be present, not as mere spectators, but as cited "to give account to him that "is ready to judge the quick and the dead." "For "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of "Christ, that every one may receive the things done "in his body, according to that he hath done, whe-"ther it be good or bad.*" Our present conduct is voluntaly; we choose whether we will serve the Lord, or no: but we shall not be allowed to choose, whether we will stand before his tribunal, or decline the awful decision.

It is extremely frivolous to start objections against the doctrines of revelation, taken from our low apprehensions, or levelled against the misinterpretations of injudicious believers. "Ye do err, not knowing the "scriptures nor the power of God." He hath declared these things in his authenticated word: "his "testimony is sure and giveth wisdom unto the sim-"ple:" and "he that believed not hath made him a "liar."

* 2 Cor. v. 10.

Will any man presume to say, that it is impossible for God to raise the dead? That human nature should be capable of such daring absurdity, ought to cover us with shame, and cause us to tremble.—Let us, my friends, imitate the old patriarch, who "by faith, be- "ing warned of God of things not seen as yet, was "moved with fear and prepared an ark." Let us "prepare to meet our God, and seriously enquire, "Who may abide the day of his coming? Or who "may stand when he appeareth?"

Neither ought we to regard those "scoffers," who, according to the prediction of the apostle, are "come "in these last days, walking after their own lusts, and "saying, where is the promise of his coming? for since "the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they "were from the beginning of the creation." We know not indeed the precise time when the Lord shall come; but we should not be ignorant that, "one day "is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thou- "sand years as one day:" and we are assured that "the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the "night; for when they shall say, peace and safety, "then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as tra- "vail upon a woman with child, and they shall not "escape."* Death is very near, and judgment follows. In this sense "The Judge standeth at the "door:" and "the end of all things is at hand." "Be ye therefore ready; for ye know not what hour "your Lord doth come." The intervening space will soon elapse: let us then, "account his long suf-

* 1 Thess. v. 2, 3.

fering to be salvation:" and "seeing we look for "such things, let us be diligent, that we may be found "of him in peace without spot and blameless."—We proceed therefore,

II. To consider the discoveries which will then be made.—"The Lord shall come, who will both bring "to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make "manifest the counsels of the hearts."

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory "and all his holy angels with him, then shall he sit "upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall "be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them "one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep "from the goats;" that is, with perfect ease, and infallible certainty. Then shall he be seated on "the "great white throne," the emblem of his awful justice and spotless purity, "and the books shall be "opened." This expression, referring to the affairs of men, leads our thoughts to the discoveries of that solemn season. *The book of the divine law* shall be opened, as the perfect standard of good and evil; *the book of Providence*, stating the talents committed to the stewardship of each individual, with the advantages or disadvantages of his situation; *the book of omniscience*, developing all the particulars of every man's conduct, and all the motives and thoughts of his heart; and the *book of conscience* or memory, answering to every charge or discovery, however before buried in oblivion. But *another book* shall also be opened, or no flesh could be saved; even *the book of life*, in which all the elect of God, all true believers, are registered, with the evidences of their repentance,

faith, and love. Then, all "men will be judged out "of those things, which are written in the books, ac- "cording to their works. And whosoever shall not "be found written in the book of life, shall be cast "into the lake of fire."*

We know but little of the real characters even of those with whom we are most intimately acquainted; and far less of other men's. A vast proportion of their outward conduct is concealed from us: what strangers then must we be to the dispositions and counsels of their hearts! Perhaps a tenth part of the actions of our nearest relatives or friends, do not come under our notice: we must therefore judge, as well as we can; and though caution be necessary, a measure of suspicion adequate to our uncertainty, would mar all our earthly enjoyments. David seems not to have suspected Ahithopel, nor the apostles Judas: yet they were both plausible hypocrites. Many of you, my friends, may perhaps be conscious, that if your neighbours, or relations, knew certain things in your conduct, which you carefully and successfully conceal; your characters would be injured, and yourselves covered with confusion. "But when the Lord shall "come, he will bring to light all these hidden things "of darkness." Then the dishonesty and extortion which have here escaped detection, and even suspicion; or which have been pleaded for with specious fallacy, will appear in all their full deformity before men and angels. The oppression, rapine, and cruelty, which have been gilded over with the splendour of

* Rev. xx. 12—15.

great talents and renowned achievements, will be viewed in another light, when "the earth shall disclose her "blood, and no more cover her slain." Nor will that degrading licentiousness and sensuality, which are often covertly practised by persons of decent or respectable character, any longer be concealed; though it is now a shame "to speak of those things which are done of "them in secret."

But to relieve our minds from such painful reflexions, let us take a view of the contrast. The Lord will also bring to light the good works of his believing people: "he saw them in secret, and he will re-"ward them openly." Those fruits of faith and love, which the world perhaps vilified and called by some opprobrious name; and those, in which they scarcely "let the left hand know what the right hand did," will then be disclosed and approved by the righteous Judge. The self-denial of his despised disciples, in sparing from every article of expence and indulgence, to raise a little fund for the relief of the needy, and even of their calumniators and persecutors; their secret prayers and compassionate tears over the very persons, who counted them harsh and uncharitable, because they would not "speak peace when there was "no peace;"* their scrupulous care to avoid every degree of injustice, when no blame was likely to be cast upon them for it; their earnestness in secret devotion, with deep humiliation and enlarged benevolence: all these will be discovered when the Lord shall come, and will greatly tend to illustrate and distin-

* Jer. viii. 11.

guish the characters of men. The blemishes and misconduct of pious persons are too often visible to their neighbours, and give occasion to their scoffs and impiety: but it will then appear, that these things were lamented before God with many groans and tears; that they condemned themselves more severely than others could condemn them; that they prayed without ceasing not to be left to repeat their sin and folly; and that they vigilantly used every means, of crucifying their evil propensities, and bridling their appetites and passions.

The discoveries of that solemn day will likewise relate to men's words. "Every idle word that men "shall speak, shall be given an account of at the "day of judgment: for by thy words thou shalt "be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be "condemned."* Our words must indeed be known in some measure to others: but men are commonly very careful to whom they declare their unreserved sentiments; and would often be extremely disconcerted, if their discourse in private circles, among the select companions of their vices, should be disclosed to those with whom they desire to maintain another kind of character. But the profane, blasphemous, atheistical, infidel, and abominable speeches, which men vent in their secret cabals; with all the falsehoods, slanders, boastings, bitterness, imprecations, and horrid language, which on some occasions they utter, during the whole course of their lives, will be produced against them before the assembled

* Matt. xii. 36, 37.

world. "For the tongue is a fire, a world of ini-
"quity; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison; it
"sets on fire the whole course of nature, and is set
"on fire of hell."* The secret influence of evil conversation, corrupts men's principles and morals, and wounds their reputations: it ruins domestick and relative comfort, and disseminates impiety, infidelity, heresy, profligacy, enmity, discord, and confusion, through neighbourhoods, cities, and nations. Yet no discovery can be made of such private mischiefs, except by the omnipresent and omniscient Judge. It would be tedious to insist particularly on the flatteries, deceptions, false colourings, seductions, and other artifices, by which wicked men carry on their base designs. These, however, are hidden things of darkness, which will be brought to light when the Lord shall come. If then all our words, without exception, whether spoken openly, or among our select companions, shall be thus made known at the great decisive day; could nothing else be produced against us, we must surely feel that this alone would overwhelm us with confusion. The story is well known, of the person, who invited a company of his friends, that were accustomed to take the Lord's name in vain; and contrived to have all their discourse taken down and read to them. Now if *they* could not endure to hear the words repeated, which they had spoken during a few hours; how shall we bear to have *all* that we have uttered, through a long course of years, brought forth as evidence against us at the tribunal of God?—But the

* Jam. iii. 6—10.

hour is coming when this will actually be the case: when not a single irreverent mention of the Creator's sacred name; not one objection to his law, government, or gospel; not one sarcasm or jest upon his cause or worshippers, shall be overlooked! when every word "spoken in the ear in closets, shall be proclaimed "on the house tops!" Where then will the wicked and ungodly appear? How shall any of us endure that scrutiny: unless we have fled for refuge to the hope of the gospel, and all our sins have been buried in the depths of the sea?

But words of another kind shall be made known when the Lord shall come. The servants of God love to associate together, and many censure them for it: but what saith the scripture? "They that feared the "Lord, spake often one to another; and the Lord "hearkened and heard it: and a book of remembrance "was written before him, for them that feared the "Lord, and thought upon his name; and they shall "be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day, when "I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a "man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then "shall ye return, and discern between the righteous "and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and "him that serveth him not."* When the "books "shall be opened;" the social piety, gratitude, and charity of true Christians will be brought to light. Their discourse about the perfections, ways, and works of God; the best methods of promoting his glory, the peace of the church, and the benefit of man-

* Mal. iii. 16—18.

kind: their mutual warnings, exhortations, counsels, and encouragements; their spiritual, affectionate, and animating conversation; and all the words which the Lord delighted to hear, will be made known before men and angels. And when these shall be contrasted with the filthy, impious, and frivolous speeches of the wicked; it may easily be conceived, how men's real characters will be discriminated, and in what sense, "by their words they will be justified or condemned."

The thoughts also of every heart shall be disclosed. Men generally imagine, that these at least are free and subject to no controul; so that they allow their memory and imagination, to excite and feed corrupt affections; representing to themselves, with all the ingenuity of invention, scenes that accord to their predominant propensities: and by these speculative indulgences they try to make themselves amends for the restrictions, which regard to reputation, interest, or health may impose.—But God especially requires purity of heart, and truth in the inward parts, by which real religion is distinguished from hypocrisy.—"Ye fools," says our Lord, to some of these whited sepulchres, "did not "he that made that which is without, make that "which is within also? Thou blind Pharisee, first "cleanse that which is within the cup and platter, that "the outside may be clean also."* How would it astonish us, if we could see all that passes in the thoughts of many very *virtuous* persons, during a single day! and as to the imaginations of the profligate; they are the very residence of evil spirits, in which

* Matt. xxiii. 25—28. Luke xi. 39, 40.

they forge all manner of abominable crimes, previous to the actual commission of them. Instead therefore of men's hearts being better than their lives, as self-flattery often suggests, they are uniformly far worse: for every sinful word and action was at first an evil thought and desire; but ten thousand evil thoughts and desires conceived and cherished in the heart, proceed no further; because men have not opportunity, courage, or ability to realize them in practice.

Every man, however, must judge for himself in this matter: but let us ask ourselves, whether we should feel comfortable, at the idea of *all* our secret thoughts being disclosed, I do not say to the whole world, but to our intimate friends and acquaintance?—Yet they must all be disclosed to men and angels, at the great day of righteous retribution!—"Let then "the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous "man his *thoughts:*" for unless evil thoughts are excluded or opposed, every apparent reformation must be hypocritical. "O Jerusalem, wash thy heart from "wickedness, how long shall vain thoughts lodge "within thee?"* Peter seems even to intimate a doubt, whether the thought of Simon Magus's heart did not constitute the unpardonable sin; "Pray God, "if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be for-"given thee."† This is therefore a matter of the greatest importance: and the discovery of those secret thoughts, which no human eye could reach, and which were scarcely ever suspected, will exceedingly help to discriminate characters at the great day. Nay,

* Jer. iv. 14. † Acts viii. 20—24.

the countless multitude of vile imaginations and desires, which are the spontaneous production of our depraved nature, will greatly illustrate the truth and justice of God, in all his declarations and decisions, concerning the workers of iniquity.

On the other hand, the thoughts of believers also will be made known, when the Lord shall come. Then it will appear, that they abhorred, and laboured to exclude, every evil imagination, and to repress all sinful desires: that they humbly mourned over the vain-glorious, envious, impatient, and peevish emotions of their hearts; and that they endeavoured to employ their minds, during their retired hours, in holy contemplations.—It will then be known how much their thoughts were occupied in considering by what means they might best glorify God, and serve their generation; and how many desires they felt and plans they formed, which they could not accomplish.—Their affectionate longings after the salvation of their relatives, neighbours, and persecutors; and the anguish of heart which they felt on their account, even when censured as severe and harsh in reproving and warning them, will be brought to light; with all other pious, holy, and benevolent thoughts and desires; and these discoveries will evidence them to have been the genuine followers of the holy Jesus.

We must even go further still in this matter: the state of every man's heart, and the motives of his actions will then be fully disclosed. The admired morality of numbers will then be demonstrated to have been only a modification of self-love; without any real regard to the authority or glory of God. The Pha-

risee's prayers, fasting, and almsgiving will be shewn to have resulted solely from pride and ostentation. Many will be proved to have preached the gospel from envy and strife, from avarice or ambition; and to have professed it, as a step to emolument or distinction. In short every mask will then be taken off: many admired characters will appear completely odious and contemptible; and "the things which have been highly "esteemed among men" will appear to have been "abomination in the sight of God." Need I say, how tremendous this must be to dissemblers of every description, who now act a plausible part, and exhibit on the stage of the world in an assumed character.

But on the other hand, the humility, gratitude, zealous love, and holy affections of true believers will be made manifest to the universe. The pure motives of those actions, which were censured or calumniated, will be demonstrated: every accusation will be silenced, all misapprehensions removed; and it will be undeniably evident, that from the time when they made an explicit profession of the gospel, their repentance, faith, love and habitual conduct were answerable to that profession.—We proceed therefore,

III. To advert to the consequences of these discoveries.—

By them the immense difference of character, between the righteous and the wicked, will be undeniably manifested. In this world, numbers find it convenient to varnish over their crimes, to palliate or excuse many parts of their conduct, and to cast others, as it were, into the back ground, where they are little observed: while regardless of their hearts, they have

leisure to place their counterfeit virtues in a conspicuous light, and to make them appear immensely better than they really are.—On the contrary, the believer has many infirmities; and is engaged in a sharp conflict with "the sin that dwelleth in him," and with the temptations of Satan. The world rigorously scrutinizes his conduct; and the Lord tries his faith and grace, as silver is tried in the furnace.—He is so afraid of hypocrisy and ostentation, that he carefully conceals many things which might exalt his character, and scrupulously shuns the appearance of good before men, when he but suspects that there is not the reality of it in the sight of God.* On these and other accounts, the apparent difference betwixt true Christians, and specious hypocrites or moralists, bears no manner of proportion to the degree in which their characters do really differ. But the discoveries of the great day will perfectly distinguish them, and all the world will "discern between the righteous and the "wicked, between him that serveth God and him "that serveth him not."

When the Lord shall thus "bring to light the hid-"den things of darkness," every mouth will be stop-"ped, and all the world will become guilty before "God; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be "justified in the sight of God."† The discoveries of the great decisive day will completely elucidate this fundamental doctrine of Christianity, which is now so generally misunderstood or opposed: for the whole of men's thoughts, words, and works will appear so con-

* 2 Cor. xii. 6. † Rom. iii. 19, 20.

trary to the holy precepts of God, or so far short of their spiritual perfection; that all must then feel the force of David's words, "If thou Lord, shouldest "mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?" As therefore "all have sinned and come short of the glo- "ry of God," all must fall under condemnation, who are not interested in the salvation of the gospel. But it may be asked, in what sense then will every man be judged according to his works? This shall be reserved for the subject of a separate discourse: and it may suffice to answer at present, that all avowed unbelievers, however distinguished, will be judged and condemned for the sins they have committed; and all professed believers will be judged according to their works, as proving, or disproving, the sincerity of their profession.

The discoveries of this awful day will likewise silence all the blasphemies, which are continually uttered, against the justice of God in the condemnation of the wicked. It is on this account, called "the day "of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment "of God." While men conceal or palliate by far the greatest and worst part of their conduct, they may argue plausibly against the denunciations of scripture: but when the whole of their character and conduct shall be openly exhibited, and all the world shall know every thing respecting them which is now seen by the heart-searching Judge alone; then the justice of the tremendous sentence will be universally acknowledged; the friends of God will perceive and adore his glory in this part of his moral government; and the wicked shall be silent in darkness and despair.

when compelled to "Depart accursed into everlasting "fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Far be it from us to suppose, that the merciful Saviour, who is TRUTH itself, would use such language, if not really applicable to the case! He does not allow us to speak deceitfully for him; and will he utter falacious words himself?—Yet we cannot hear of eternal punishment, unquenchable fire, outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth, a worm that never dieth, and the place prepared for the devil and his angels, without feeling our hearts tremble, and revolt against the description.—How unspeakably dreadful then will be the accomplishment! when the Lord, to stop the sinner's mouth, by a discovery of his crimes, shall say, with stern indignation, "These things hast thou "done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was "altogether such a one as thyself, but I will reprove "thee and set them in order before thine eyes!—Now "consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in "pieces, and there be none to deliver."* Cease then, poor sinner, to object and dispute; and make haste to flee from the wrath to come, and to seek refuge in the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A more pleasing subject, however, is before us, while we contemplate the redeemed of the Lord, saved by his grace, washed from their sins in the Saviour's atoning blood, completely justified, absolved from every charge, and "presented faultless before "the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

* Ps. l. 21, 22.

Then death will be swallowed up in victory; and raptures inexpressible will commence a felicity, still to be increased, with the enlargement of their capacities, through the countless ages of eternity.—But I must leave it to your own minds, brethren, to form some conception of the opposite sensations, which will delight, or agonize every heart, when the wicked "shall "go away into everlasting punishment, and the righ- "teous into life eternal."

"And then shall every man have praise of God." Then every humble believer, according to his measure of faith and grace, will be honoured with the commendation of his condescending Lord, for those services which the world condemned, and which perhaps his brethren undervalued or censured. To be accosted by the Judge of the world, in these most gracious terms, "Well done, good and faithful servant, "enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," will form an adequate gratification to the noblest ambition, of which the rational nature is capable. Seeking for this glory, honour, and immortality, let us here be indifferent to all human applauses or contemptuous reproaches. This is the honour that cometh from God only, and is reserved for all his saints; when no more danger shall remain of their being exalted above measure, or sacrilegiously ascribing any thing to themselves: but when; on the contrary, "they will cast their crowns "before the throne," and return all to the bounteous Giver, in endless songs of adoring praise. Let us not faint then, on account of our trials and difficulties; "For our light afflictions which are but for a moment

"are working for us, a far more exceeding and eter-
"nal weight of glory."

Let us also remember the caution, "judge nothing
"before the time." Our duty often requires us to form some judgment of men's characters and actions: but in all other respects, our business is with ourselves and the Lord,—and not with our fellow servants. And the more diligent we are, "to be found of
"him in peace, without spot and blameless;" the less time and thought we shall have to spare, for censuring and condemning the conduct, or suspecting the motives, of other men.

But do you, my friends, really believe these things? and are you preparing to meet your Judge? I fear, the actions, conversation, and spirit of numbers awfully prove the contrary. Still, however, the Lord waits to be gracious: flee then to him as a Saviour, without longer delay, who will speedily come to be your Judge.—You who profess the gospel, be advised and persuaded to examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith: look well to it that your evidences of conversion are clear and decisive; for that day, of which we speak, will detect multitudes of self-deceivers, as well as unmask many artful hypocrites. And if you are conscious of following the Lord with an upright heart; take heed that you do not slacken your diligence, or yield to unwatchfulness: "Let your loins
"be girded and your lights burning; and ye yourselves
"like unto men that wait for their Lord:" for blessed are those servants whom "the Lord when he cometh
"shall find watching; verily I say unto you, that he

"shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to "meat, and will come forth and serve them."* "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast and "unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the "Lord: for as much as ye know that your labour is "not in vain in the Lord."

* Luke xii. 35—38.

SERMON IX.

ROMANS, ii. 6—9.

Who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality; eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath; tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.

IN meditating on the solemnities, discoveries, and consequences of that great decisive day, when the Lord shall come to be our Judge; we were obliged to pass over in a general manner, several important particulars relative to the subject: and especially we reserved for a separate discourse, the consideration of the manner, in which all men will be judged according to their works, and receive according to what they have done, whether it be good or evil. The present will therefore be an appendix to the preceding discourse, as intended to illustrate its interesting truths, and to render them more perspicuous and impressive.

In the passage before us, the apostle does not undertake to decide a controverted point of doctrine, to state the method of a sinner's justification, or to account for that difference of character which actually subsists among the descendants of fallen Adam. These subjects he has fully discussed in other parts of his writings: but here he takes occasion from his subject to shew, that the opposite conduct of the righteous and the wicked will terminate in future happiness or misery. He considers some persons more favoured by providence than others, as the Jews had every way the advantage of the Gentiles: but he intimates that they generally abused those advantages to their deeper condemnation: "Despisest thou the riches "es of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suf"fering, not knowing that the goodness of God lead"eth thee to repentance?" The more kind, patient, and merciful the Lord is, the baser our rebellion and ingratitude must appear, the greater cause have we to repent, and the more abundant motives and encouragements. But if men presume on his lenity, supposing that he will not or cannot punish, and so encourage themselves in sin, they "despise the riches "of his goodness and mercy;" and "after their hard"ness and impenitent heart, treasure up to them"selves wrath, against the day of wrath and revela"tion of the righteous judgment of God, who will "render to every man according to his deeds." The treasures, which they, perhaps covetously and dishonestly, accumulate on earth, must be left to their survivors: but the vast accessions, which they daily make to their load of guilt, and the heavy wrath of

God against them, are laid up for *themselves*, to be their future and eternal portion. For at the great day of righteous retribution, God "will render unto eve-"ry man according to his deeds: to them who by pa-"tient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and "honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them "that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, "but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, "tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man "that doeth evil."— In discoursing on these words, I shall endeavour,

I. To describe more fully the two characters contrasted by the apostle, and to shew the doom reserved for each.

II. Compare the statement thus made with several other important scriptures, which may serve to elucidate and confirm it.

III. Explain more precisely the rule of judgment, as delivered in the sacred oracles: and

IV. Make some particular application of the subject.

I. Then I shall endeavour to describe more fully the two characters contrasted by the apostle, and to shew the doom reserved for each.

The apostle's reasoning throughout this whole epistle proves, that he was speaking of sinners under a dispensation of mercy. He therefore considers a man, thus circumstanced, proposing to himself the acquisition of glory, and honour, and immortality. Such a purpose must imply a belief of the scriptural doctrine, concerning the perfections and government of God, the immortality of the soul, and a future state

of righteous retribution: with a persuasion that eternal happiness is attainable even by sinners, in the way which the Lord hath revealed. At the same time the man is convinced, that the blessing must be sought with diligence and self-denial, and that it ought to be preferred before all other objects whatever. Thus, while "there be many that say, Who will shew us "any good,"—"seeking every man his gain from his "quarter," pursuing worldly pleasures, honours, and distinctions, or wasting their lives in sloth and dissipation; he "seeks first the kingdom of God and his "righteousness," and "labours for the meat which "endureth unto everlasting life." He is now become a candidate for "glory, and honour, and immor-"tality:" and nothing, inferior to an endless inheritance and unfading joys, can satisfy the vast desires of his heart. Whatever he renounces, ventures, or suffers, he resolves to seek "a kingdom that cannot be "moved." He feels the force of our Lord's questions, "What is a man profited, if he gain the whole "world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man "give in exchange for his soul?" He does not, however, merely seek deliverance from wrath and misery; he is also athirst for happiness in the enjoyment of God, and of those "pleasures which are at his right "hand for evermore." He attends to religion, not that he may be seen of men, or acquire reputation; nor is he solely intent on pacifying an uneasy conscience: but as a reasonable creature, formed for an immortal existence, he aims, in this introductory scene, to ensure felicity in the world to come. He "believes that God is, and that he is the rewarder of

"them that diligently seek him;" and therefore he seeks his favour, as "the one thing needful," and endeavours to render all other objects and pursuits subservient to this grand concern.

It is evident that men of this stamp are very scarce; and that most of those, who are called Christians, are wholly strangers to this habitual purpose and conduct. The few, who answer the description, are not confined to any single sect, but are scattered about in the visible church, as "men wondered at" for their singularity and preciseness. Now, at whatever period of life, any man is thus brought "to seek glory, and ho-"nour, and immortality," he enters on a new state, and constitutes a new character; "being made free "from sin, he becomes the servant of God, has his "fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

These persons seek the desired good "by patient "continuance in well doing." A sinner cannot be said *to do well*, until he humbles himself before God for his transgressions, mourns for them in true repentance, confesses them with self-abhorence and a sincere purpose of forsaking them, and seeks mercy in the way which God hath appointed, for the glory of his own name and the honour of his violated law. A rebel can do nothing well, so long as he vindicates and persists in his rebellion, refuses mercy because the terms of it are too humiliating, and is wholly averse to submission and renewed allegiance. The prodigal son, when he came to himself, and determined to return home, and humbly crave his father's forgiveness, began to do well. The proud morality, formal devotion, or ostentatious liberality, of an impenitent sinner,

will never meet the approbation of that God, who sent his Son into the world, "not to call the righteous but "sinners to repentance." Humble penitents, and they alone, begin to answer to the character described by the apostle.

All such persons will likewise credit the testimony of God concerning his Son, and the way of acceptance through his atonement and mediation. Whatever modern reasoners may plausibly advance concerning the *innocence of error*, and the small importance of doctrinal truth: the inspired writers uniformly consider unbelief as springing from an evil heart; and false doctrines, as *damnable heresies*, and *strong delusions*, which God permits for the punishment of those who hate the truth, because they love sin.—"How can ye "believe, who receive honour one of another?" "This is the condemnation, that light is come into "the world, and men love darkness rather than light, "*because their deeds are evil.*" "He that believeth "on the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believ- "eth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of "God abideth on him."* This is a fair specimen of the scriptural declarations on this subject; and as Christ "is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no man "cometh to the Father but by him;" we may assuredly infer, that no one *does well*, according to the apostle's meaning, who believes not in the Son of God, but refuses to seek eternal life as the gift of God in him.

* John, iii. 16—21. 36.

The Lord hath instituted in his holy word, certain ordinances, as means of grace to our souls, and that in them we may render him the glory due unto his name. The characters, of whom we speak, will certainly honour the Lord and seek his blessing, by a diligent and conscientious observance of these ordinances. They will also separate from bad company, avoid temptations and occasions of sin, exercise self-denial, and renounce all pleasures or interests, which interfere with the exercise of divine love and the obedience of faith; and they will prove the sincerity of their religious profession, by observing the directions, and copying the example of the Lord Jesus, and by walking in newness of life.

Numbers, like the stony ground-hearers, shew much earnestness in these things, and express great confidence and joy: yet they are partial in obedience, and continue but for a time. They readily perform such duties, as are creditable, cheap, and easy; but they refuse to part with Herodias, or to cut off the offending right hand; they do not mortify constitutional or customary evils, reject unhallowed gain, venture the displeasure of rich and powerful friends, or attend to those things in religion, which would expose them to contempt, reproach, and hardship.—Thus they maintain a religious profession, while exempted from peculiar trials; and many pass through life, unsuspected by themselves or others: but "if persecution or "tribulation arise because of the word, by and by per-"sons of this character are offended."—On the contrary, they, of whom we now speak, have "received "the good seed into an honest and good heart, and

" bring forth fruit with patience." They are not partial in their religion, but shew themselves the friends of Christ by doing whatsoever he commands them. They have indeed many infirmities, and may fall into sin through inadvertency; they may even live in some sinful neglect or practice, through ignorance or mistake, but cannot habitually commit known sin. They search out their faults; and as they discover any, repent and forsake them. " Their hearts are sound in the " Lord's statutes, and they shall never be ashamed."

In this course of believing obedience, the disciples of Christ encounter many temptations, struggle with various discouragements, and are exposed to sharp trials. The contempt and hatred of the world, the assaults of the tempter, the peculiarities of their circumstances, dispositions, and habits, and the chastisements of their heavenly Father, combine to try their patience. Perseverance and constancy, in following the dictates of conscience, expose them to the charge of obstinacy and perverseness, or subject them to heavy losses and difficulties; while inward conflicts, permitted to humble and prove them, sometimes make them ready to faint and despond.—Yet they " patiently continue in well-doing;" they submit to the will of God under afflictions, meekly bear injuries, wait the appointed time for the fulfilment of the Lord's promises, and persevere in the path of upright obedience. They seek for blessings which cannot be expected in any other way: and are from the world, or walk in newness of life. For they are ready to say, " Lord to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of " eternal life."—Their religion resembles a river,

which still continues to flow, though sometimes with a fuller current, and at others with a diminished stream: while that of the hypocrite resembles a land-flood, now impetuously deluging the fields, and then wholly disappearing. But to those, who thus "patiently continue in well-doing," and to them only, will the righteous Judge at last assign the eternal inheritance. "He that continueth to the end shall be saved."

We need not enlarge on the reverse of this character. "Unto them that are contentious, and do not "obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indigna- "tion and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every "soul of man that doeth evil." Such persons, instead of believing the gospel, and in humble repentance embracing the promised salvation, contend against it, "contradicting and blaspheming." They dispute against the strictness of the divine law or justice, and the sentence denounced against transgressors. They oppose their own reasonings against the express testimony of God, in respect of the mysteries of redemption; and venture to charge him foolishly, as if they were more wise and righteous than He.—Being thus "contentious, they do not obey the truth;" they will not submit to God, repent of sin, believe in Christ, separate "they obey unrighteousness:" sin, in one form or other, has dominion over them; and their unbelief is the effect of a depraved heart and a rebellious will, which it tends reciprocally to confirm and render more desperate. To all these the righteous Judge will recompense "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish;" not regarding their outward privileges or distinctions, but deciding impartially according to

their works: for, "there is no respect of persons with "God." Let us then,

II. Compare this statement with several other important scriptures, which may serve to elucidate and confirm it.

It is the uniform declaration of the sacred writers, that all men shall be judged according to their works: yet it is equally evident that faith, or unbelief, determines a man's state in the sight of God, as justified, or as under condemnation. "He that believeth and "is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not "shall be damned." "Verily, verily, I say unto "you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him "that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not "come into condemnation, but is passed from death "unto life." "He that believeth not is condemned "already: because he hath not believed in the name "of the only begotten Son of God."* The same instruction is implied in the apostle's vision. "The "books were opened: and another book was opened, "which is the book of life; and the dead were judged "out of those things, which were written in the books "according to their works; and whosoever was not "found written in the book of life, was cast into the "lake of fire."†

The prophet, having shewn that the ways of the Lord are equal, was led to state the characters of the righteous and the wicked; and then he adds, "When "the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, "and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall

* Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 18. v. 24. † Rev. xx. 12—15.

"save his soul alive;—repent and turn from all your "transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin."* The true penitent therefore will not be condemned, when judged according to his deeds; which he must be, if the solemn process should be conducted according to the strictness of the law, without reference to the grace of the gospel, to which all these invitations and promises belong.

The atoning sacrifices of the Mosaick law, which typified the redemption of Christ, were offered upon mount Zion: and David, enquiring who should ascend and worship with acceptance on that holy hill, draws a character, which entirely accords with that given of a true believer in the new Testament."† Thus he shews us, *which of the professors of true religion* will stand accepted in the day of judgment: but this hath nothing to do with such as openly neglect or oppose revealed truth, or refuse the salvation of the gospel.

In perfect harmony with these scriptures, our Lord describes his true disciples, "Whosoever shall do the "will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is "my brother, my sister, and my mother." "Blessed "are they that hear the word of God and keep it."‡ This word or will of God doubtless has peculiar relation to Christ, and the voice from heaven, "This is "my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear "ye him:" and a moral or pharisaical decency of conduct most essentially differs from the obedience of faith. "He that believeth not God hath made him a

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* Ezekiel xviii, 27—30. † Ps. xv.
‡ Matt. xii, 49, 50. Luke xi. 28.

" liar, because he believeth not the record that God " gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God " hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his " Son; he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath " not the Son of God hath not life."* The unbeliever, therefore, whatever his moral character may be, so far from doing the will of God, disobeys his express command, and deliberately affronts his veracity.

Our Lord closed his sermon on the mount with this remarkable passage. " Not every one that saith " unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom " of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father " which is in heaven. Many will say to me *in that* " *day*, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy " name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy " name done many wonderful works? and *then* will " I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from " me ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever " heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will " liken him unto a wise man, which built his house " upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods " came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house " and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. " And every one that heareth these sayings of mine " and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish " man, which built his house upon the sand; and the " rains descended and the floods came, and the winds " blew, and beat upon that house and it fell, and great " was the fall of it."† This passage evidently refers

* 1 John v. 10—12.
† Matt. vii. 21—27. Luke vi. 46—49.

to the day of judgment; but it mentions none except those who call Christ Lord, come to him, and hear his sayings. His professed disciples therefore are exclusively intended; and living faith is described as distinguishable from dead faith by its holy fruits. Disobedient professors of Christianity will be condemned as hypocrites, or wicked and slothful servants; and avowed unbelievers as "enemies who would not have "the Son of God to reign over them."*

But the solemn description of the great decisive day, given us by the Judge himself, is most conclusive on the subject.† In this important scripture, acts of kindness, shewn to believers for the sake of Christ, are the only deeds mentioned, as the reason for the rejoicing words addressed to the righteous. "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom "prepared for you from the beginning of the world." And no charge is brought against the wicked, but their omission of such duties, when the sentence is denounced, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, "prepared for the devil and his angels." Yet it will then appear, that the righteous have performed many other good works of divers kinds, and that the wicked have been guilty of numerous other crimes and omissions. Why then did our Lord mention these things exclusively? Doubtless, because he supposed them to constitute the most conclusive evidence of genuine faith, or unbelief. Beneficence, not springing from love to Christ, nor exercised towards his disciples, his *brethren* or representatives, cannot be here intend-

* Matt. xxv. 30. Luke xix. 21—27. † Matt. xxv. 31—46.

ed, as many have inconsiderately imagined, for who will say, that an indiscriminate liberality: connected with an ungodly licentious life, will entitle a man to the heavenly inheritance? Or if any should venture on such an assertion, would *they* also allow, that the want of this beneficence will expose a man to the awful doom here denounced, however free from vice, or adorned with other virtues, his character may have been? Or will any one maintain, that the liberality of infidels to one another, from whatever motive, answers to our Lord's words, "I was hungry and ye gave *me* "meat;—for as much as ye did it to the least of these "*my brethren*, ye did it unto *me?*"—Indeed a measure of the same absurdities attaches to every other interpretation of this passage; except that which goes upon the following principles, gathered from the several parts of the sacred volume. There is no salvation for sinners, except by the mercy of God through Jesus Christ; no interest in this salvation without faith; no true faith, except that which worketh by love; no love to Christ is genuine which is not accompanied by special love to his disciples; and no love to the brethren is unfeigned, which does not influence a man to alleviate their distresses, supply their wants, and do them good, as he hath opportunity and ability. This love is the fruit of the Spirit: where the Spirit of Christ dwells, all the fruits of the Spirit will be produced: and "if any man have not the spirit of Christ "he is none of his." A detail of particulars would not have suited the majesty of our Lord's description: the most prominent distinguishing feature of believers and unbelievers was selected; and thus an intimation

was given of the rule of judgment, sufficiently clear to the humble student of scripture, though others may mistake or pervert it. In this view of it the whole is obvious, and coincides with other testimonies of the sacred writers. "We know that we have passed from death "unto life, because *we love the brethren.*"* "Seeing "ye have purified your hearts through the Spirit, un- "to unfeigned *love of the brethren;* see that ye love "one another with a pure heart fervently; being born "again—by the word of God."† "If a brother or "sister be naked, or destitute of daily food, and one "of you say, depart in peace, be ye warmed and fill- "ed; notwithstanding ye give them not those things "which are needful for the body; what doth it profit?" "My little children, let us not love in word, neither "in tongue, but in deed and in truth: and hereby we "know, that we are of the truth, and shall assure our "hear tbefore him."‡ So that love of the brethren, shewn in active kindness, is uniformly required as evidence of our faith in Christ and love to his name.

These reflections elucidate the following scriptures also, and are confirmed by them. "Know, O vain "man, that faith without works is dead." "The "grace of God that bringeth salvation—teacheth us, "that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we "should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this "present world; looking for that blessed hope, and "the glorious appearing of the great God, and our "Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, to

* 1 John iii. 14. † 1 Pet. i. 22, 23.
‡ Jam. ii. 15, 16. 1 John iii. 18, 19.

" redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify to himself " a peculiar people, zealous of good works."*

One most solemn and affecting passage still remains to be considered: " The Lord Jesus shall be revealed " from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on " them that know not God, and that obey not the " gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be " punished with everlasting destruction, from the pre- " sence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; " when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and " to be admired in all them that believe."† We are here expressly informed, that at the day of judgment all will be condemned, who have not *known God*, and *obeyed the gospel;* but how many persons of moral character and external respectability will be found in that company! No exceptions, however, are intimated; the saints, even those that believe, will alone stand accepted by the Judge; and all else will be punished with everlasting destruction from his presence.

I shall conclude this part of the subject, with the words which Christ spake to his servant John, " Be- " hold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, " to give every man according as his work shall be.— " I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, " the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his " commandments, that they may have a right to the " Tree of life, and may enter in through the gates in- " to the city."‡ But to whom does the title and privilege of the Tree of life belong? Surely to the true

* Tit. ii. 11—14. † 2 Thess. i. 5—12.
‡ Rev. xxii. 12—14.

believer, who loves Christ, and keeps his commandments. "Ye are my friends," says he, "if ye do "whatsoever I command you."

This view of the subject harmonizes the whole scripture, and reconciles those parts which seem to be contrary to each other: but when this centre of unity is overlooked, men either "go about to establish their "own righteousness," or run into antinomianism. These two extremes are the *Scylla* and *Charibdis*, the fatal rock or dreadful whirlpool, of our perilous voyage. I have therefore endeavoured to mark out the safe passage between them; and may the Holy Spirit guide us at a distance from these, and all other dangers, on the right hand and on the left! We proceed then,

III. To state more explicitly, and shew more precisely, the rules of judgment, as delivered in the sacred oracles.

It is most evident, that the scripture was intended principally for those who bestow pains to understand it: and this obvious reflection illustrates the propriety of the descriptions there given of the great decisive day; for they certainly relate almost exclusively to those who profess the religion of the Bible. We cannot therefore infer any thing from these descriptions, concerning those who have not been favoured with revelation, or have rejected it: though other scriptures give some light on the subject. The holy law is the unalterable rule of right and wrong, in respect of all men however distinguished: nor is it possible, that God should judge of characters and actions by any other rule; for the law is the exact reflection of his in-

finite holiness, and he cannot deny himself. He can, however, pardon the guilty, and make allowance for unavoidable disadvantages. "They who know not "the will of God and do it not, shall be beaten with "few stripes: but they who know and refuse to do "his will shall be beaten with many stripes."* It will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for those who heard the doctrines and saw the miracles of Christ, and did not repent and believe the gospel.

The apostle therefore adds, a few verses after the text; "as many as have sinned without law shall also "perish without law." They have indeed violated the perfect rule of duty: but, as they had not the advantage of the written word, they will not be liable to so heavy a condemnation, as wicked Jews and Christians: yet as they acted against the dictates of their own reason and conscience, those remains of the law originally written in the heart, they "will perish with-"out law." For "being a law to themselves," their consciences may indeed excuse some parts of their conduct, but they must condemn others; especially in the day, when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ: so that "every mouth will be stopped, "and all the world become guilty before God."† All, except idiots (who scarcely can be thought accountable creatures), know far better than they practise, and might know much more, were not their hearts set against the truth through love of sin. All men must therefore be condemned according to this

* Luke xii. 47, 48. † Rom. iii. 19.

rule and the number, and aggravation of their crimes, compared with the measure of their advantages, is the standard, by which their punishment will be ascertained, by the infinitely righteous Judge.

What the Lord may do *in mercy* to any of his sinful creatures, it does not become us to enquire, beyond what he hath seen good to reveal: but we have no ground to suppose that any who die without spiritual religion can be happy in another world; and neither scripture nor history countenance the opinion, that the Lord gives his sanctifying Spirit, where he has not sent some measure of the light of revelation.—We are sure, however, that the state of pagans will be far better, than that of wicked Christians, so called. While we therefore rejoice in our privileges; we may tremble, lest they should increase our condemnation: and the state of the nations, who still sit in darkness and the shadow of death, should animate our endeavours, and excite our prayers for their conversion.

The apostle adds, "as many as have sinned under "the law, shall be judged by the law." The Jews rejected the gospel, and sought justification by the works of the law. Deists discard revelation, and rely on their own moral conduct to recommend them to God; and various descriptions of professed Christians form a complex law of works, out of the religion of the new Testament. But whatever system, men favoured with revelation may adopt, if they put the event of the great decisive day, on their own works, as the ground of their confidence; they will be judged according to the holy law of God, and fall under its awful curse. "Christ is become of none effect to them:

"they are fallen from grace, and become debtors to "do the whole law."* The advantages such men enjoy, the crimes they commit, their proud aversion to the humbling salvation of the gospel, and the degree of their enmity and opposition to the truth, will determine the measure of their guilt and punishment, according to the decision of unerring wisdom, and infinite justice.

Some observations have already been made on the case of those, who allow the doctrines of Christianity, renounce dependence on their own works, and profess to expect pardon, righteousness, and eternal life, "as "the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Such persons, when the Lord shall come, will be judged according to this profession; and if their faith be shewn to have been living and genuine, by its holy fruits, according to the discoveries which have been mentioned, they will as justified believers receive the reward of righteousness; and their future glory and felicity will be proportioned to the degree of their grace and obedience of faith. But if their conduct and dispositions have proved, that they were not true believers; they will remain under the condemnation of the law, aggravated by their abuse of the gospel; and so have their portion with hypocrites and unbelievers.

IV. Then let us make some particular application of the subject.

It has been before remarked, that "we *must* all ap- "pear before the judgment seat of Christ;" and let

* Gal. v. 1—6.

this reflection sink deep into every heart. Men voluntarily break the laws of their country, but dire compulsion takes place, when they are convicted and executed for their crimes. The young man, rejoicing in his vigour and flow of spirits, may give a loose to his passions; but let him remember that "for all "these things God will bring him into judgment."— You may now forget God; but he will not forget you, or any of your works. You may affront his justice, and despise his mercy: but he will shortly say, "It is a "people of no understanding; therefore he that made "them will have no mercy on them."* Now is the day of the Lord's patience; but the day of wrath and perdition of ungodly men approacheth: now he invites you to draw near to his throne of grace; shortly he will summon you to his awful tribunal. "Seek ye "the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him, "while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, "and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him "return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on "him, and to our God, for he will abundantly par-"don." "Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for "many—shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able. "When once the master of the house is risen up, "and hath shut to the door;" it will be for ever in vain for those that stand without, to cry, "Lord, Lord, "open to us." Now the Saviour pleads with you, in accents of tenderest love; "how long ye simple "ones will ye love simplicity, and scorners delight in "their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye

* Is. xxvii. 11.

" at my reproof, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, " I will make known my words unto you." But, ere long, he will frown on the impenitent and unbelieving, and say, " Because I called and ye refused, I " stretched out my hands and no man regarded;— " therefore shall ye eat the fruit of your own ways, " and be filled with your own devices."—" Oh that " men were wise, that they understood these things, " that they would consider their latter end!"*

But will any of you, with this solemn season of discovery and decision before your eyes, deliberately put the event of it upon the goodness of your hearts and lives? Is there not in your very soul an involuntary shrinking from so strict and awful a scrutiny? Do you not feel a disposition to say, " Enter not into judg- " ment with thy servant, O Lord? " If thou, Lord, " shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who may stand?" As you value your immortal souls, do not now insist on any plea, which you feel to be inadmissible in the great day of righteous retribution. Stand not on any distinction between your case and that of your fellow sinners. Seek above all things an interest in the atonement and righteousness of Christ; and count all but loss, that you may win him, and be found in him. Disregard the scorn and reproach of an unbelieving world; anticipating that day, when every eye shall see the despised Redeemer, and his favour be universally allowed of more value than ten thousand worlds. " Let every one," however, " that nameth the name " of Christ depart from all iniquity." " If we say

* Prov. 1. 19—31. Deut. xxxii, 29.

"that we have faith, and have not works, will faith "save us," in the day "when the Lord shall render "unto every man according to his deeds?"—Alas! a dead faith, a presumptuous hope, and an unsound profession, will only increase the anguish and shame of final condemnation.

Even if we be true believers, negligence and loose walking will cloud our evidence, and weaken our warranted confidence: while the greatest possible encouragement is given to all genuine good works, by that very system, which excludes boasting, and allows none of our services the least share in our justification before God. "Not a cup of cold water given "to a disciple, from love to Christ, shall lose its re-"ward." He will accept every kindness to those whom we look upon as his brethren, even as if we had done it to him in person: and while we forgive injuries, love enemies, deny ourselves, endure hardships, or bear any cross, from love to his name, and desire to adorn and recommend his gospel; he notices our poor services, and will applaud and reward them before men and angels.—Nay, if he observe, that we form plans and make attempts to promote his cause and be serviceable to his people; even though he see good to disappoint our endeavours; he will kindly accept the zealous intention, and openly say, "Thou didst well "that it was in thine heart." "Let us not therefore "be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall "reap, if we faint not:" and "may we all find mercy "of the Lord in that day of retribution," and have an abundant entrance into his kingdom of everlasting glory and felicity.

SERMON X.

1 TIMOTHY vi. 6.

Godliness with contentment is great gain.

THE desire of gain, in one form or another, is universal: for though no one can seek the true riches for himself, without disinterested love to God and his neighbour; yet love to himself and thirst after happiness cannot be extinguished; being essential to our nature as God originally constituted it, and not superinduced by the entrance of sin. If, however, the apostle's compendious maxim were generally believed, how many vain projects would be superseded! What fatigues, dangers, anxieties, envies, contentions, frauds, oppressions, wars, murders, and mischiefs might be prevented!

The context is worthy of our peculiar attention. The servants in those days were generally slaves; and it frequently happened that Christians were the property of pagans. Such a condition is commonly thought very wretched, and slaves have seldom escaped cruel usage: yet the apostle elsewhere says, "Art "thou called being a servant? care not for it." The

Christian slave is Christ's freed man; for, "if the Son "make you free, then are ye free indeed:" but the ungodly master is in deplorable bondage; "for he "that committeth sin, is the servant of sin."

In this view of the subject the apostle says, "Let "as many servants, as are under the yoke, count "their own masters worthy of all honour: that the "name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed." For if Christian servants behaved less respectfully to their masters, than others did; the heathens would blame their religion, as teaching them to violate the duties of their station. "And they," says he, "that "have believing masters, let them not despise them, "because they are brethren; but rather do them ser- "vice, because they are faithful and beloved, parta- "kers of the benefit." No doubt the involuntary servitude of those, who have not, by atrocious crimes, forfeited their liberty, is inconsistent with the moral law of God; and if *real* christianity should become universal, slavery must be finally abolished. But the apostles were not legislators or civil magistrates: as ministers of religion, they taught men how to act in their several situations *as matters then stood:* and when the rulers embraced the gospel, it was proper they too should be taught their duty, and instructed to apply a legal and regular remedy to the evil. But it would have exceedingly increased the opposition made to the gospel, if the preachers of it had attempted, by their own influence to subvert the existing system in this respect; or even required Christian masters indiscriminately to liberate their slaves. Whereas, if they were taught to use them as brethren, the ends of hu-

manity would be effectually answered, as to the individuals concerned, and the example would have the most salutary tendency.

Having stated this matter, the apostle next shewed the sources and consequences of the contrary doctrine; exhorted Timothy to withdraw from vain disputers, who "supposed that gain was godliness:" and then subjoined the words of the text, "but godliness "with contentment is great gain;" for, says he, "We brought nothing into the world, and it is cer- "tain, that we can carry nothing out. And having "food and raiment, let us be therewith content."—

In considering the subject we may,

I. Notice the connexion between godliness and contentment.

II. Shew in what respects godliness with contentment is great gain.

III. Deduce some practical instructions.

I. We notice the connexion between godliness and contentment, as it is evidently implied in the text.

The word *godliness* frequently occurs in the writings of the apostles, and must therefore be understood according to the tenour of their doctrine. We must not consider it merely, as a proper regulation of our affections and conduct towards God, according to the first table of the moral law; but as implying especially the dispositions and demeanour, suited to a sinner under a dispensation of mercy, and invited to reconciliation with his offended God, through the Mediator of the new covenant.

When this has been duly attended to, it will evidently appear, that deep humility and unfeigned re-

pentance constitute an essential part of evangelical godliness; for unless we habitually possess this frame of mind, we cannot sincerely make those confessions and supplications, or present those sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, which are peculiar to Christianity. Now every reflecting man must perceive, that deep humility, accompanied with cheering hope, exceedingly tends to produce contentment. A vast proportion of the impatience and fretfulness of mankind results from a false estimate of their own merits and consequence. This induces them to consider their trials great, their comforts few and trivial, the least affront intolerable; and every kind and degree of respect inadequate, except unqualified adulation and submission. But such views of Jehovah and the adoring seraphim, as filled Isaiah with self-abasement; or such apprehensions of the divine majesty, as caused Job to "abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes," would give them very different views in these respects. Did they enter into the feelings of the apostle, when he called himself the "chief of sinners," and "less than "the least of all saints;" were they ready to own with the centurion, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou "shouldst come under my roof;" or with John Baptist, "I am not worthy to loose his shoe-latchet;" a total revolution would take place in all their sentiments and sensations about outward comforts and trials, and the usage they meet with from those around them. The sharpest affliction would then appear light and momentary, compared with their deserts; the meanest provision would be received with lively gratitude; while with the patriarch they confessed, "we are not

" worthy of the least of all thy mercies:" the most unfavourable situation or disagreeable employment would be considered as better, than they have a right to expect: and in the greatest injuries or affronts, they would submit to the justice of God, who may correct or punish by whatever instruments he pleases.

Humble thoughts of themselves reconcile men to obscure stations, mean circumstances, and common occupations, as most suited to them: and when they are evidently called to more publick services, they enter on them with reluctance and diffidence; except as lively faith renders them superior to their fears, and a sense of duty engages them to proceed. Such men are ready to stoop, and in honour to prefer others; they do not complain of being buried in situations, where they are undervalued or neglected. They " think soberly of themselves, and as they ought to " think;" and this secures them from manifold disappointments and vexations, to which other men are exposed. ' That will break a proud man's *heart*, which ' will scarcely break a humble man's sleep:' and it is certain that many of the troubles of life affect our peace almost in exact proportion to the degree of our pride or humility. The common opinion therefore, that self-abasement produces melancholy, and that a favourable opinion of ourselves tends to cheerfulness, is an egregious mistake. The former may indeed depress the spirits when connected with misapprehension, ignorance, and unbelief; and the latter may produce a flow of agreeable sensations, when nothing occurs to ruffle the mind. Such a state, however, is so seldom to be expected in this changing world, and

amidst the mortifications to which self-sufficiency exposes men; that the cheerfulness depending on it must be extremely precarious; while patience, meekness, hope in God, and humble gratitude evidently conduce to an uniform composure and serenity; the direct contrast to disappointed pride and ambition, rankling resentment, sickening envy, and rebellious murmurs.

Even godly sorrow for sin, when accompanied with a humble hope of mercy, produces a tender pleasure, a melting sweetness, a serious joy, a heart-felt satisfaction, which far exceed the utmost refinements of sinful indulgence. Repentance itself, which men postpone under the notion that it is the bane of comfort, is the source of the purest and most permanent rejoicing; and the true Christian must consider those seasons, in which, melted into contrition for his sins, he sowed the seed of his future harvest with penitent tears, as but little removed from the happiest hours of his life.

Faith likewise, which in its varied exercises constitutes a most important part of evangelical godliness, is intimately connected with contentment.—As "the evidence of things not seen," it sets before us the holy heart-searching God, and causes us to speak and act as in his immediate presence. This powerfully tends to calm our tumultuous passions, to awe our souls into adoring submission, and to encourage confidence and humble expectation. Faith descries an invisible world, and places us on the verge of eternity, as about to launch into that boundless ocean. With this prospect before us, the concerns of time shrink into insignificancy: and all that disparity of rank or fortune,

which subsists among dying men, and about which their contests, cares, and discontents are principally excited, appear like a fleeting dream, a pageant passing over the stage. Our trials also are perceived to be transient and unimportant: we feel it to be a weakness and folly greatly to disquiet ourselves about such trifles: and discover that our wisdom consists in being careful to discharge our duty, while on our pilgrimage. So that, if "we looked more to the things which are "not seen;" and less to "the things which are seen;" we should certainly become more satisfied with our lot, and less anxious about our temporal provision.'

Faith beholds especially the unseen Saviour; and crediting the sure testimony of God, contemplates him in all the scenes of his life and death. And whether we look to the stable and manger at Bethlehem: the cottage and carpenter's shop at Nazareth; or the well in Samaria, where Jesus wearied with his journey sat down at noon and craved a draught of water: whether we follow him to the desert, where he was an hungered while tempted by the devil; to the field, where with up-lifted hands and eyes, he gave thanks for the barley bread and small fishes; or to the meals which he and his disciples may be supposed to have made on the broken fragments of that humble feast; or whether we meditate on his general poverty, who had not where to lay his head; his scanty maintenance, at one time earned with the sweat of his brow, at another received as the alms of his followers; every object may teach us, "in whatever state we are therewith to be "content." If we turn our thoughts to the contradiction, contempt, and insult, the injustice and cruelty,

to which he voluntarily submitted: the patience, meekness, serenity, and love which he manifested, or the glorious event of his sufferings and death: we may, in every one of these reflections, as it were, hear him say, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? "Was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow?" Nor can we select one scene, which does not most powerfully inculcate resignation, contentment, and thankfulness, whatever our circumstances and difficulties may be. For who has meaner provision, or is more injuriously treated, than the holy One of God, the spotless Sacrifice for our numberless transgressions?

Faith receives also the instruction of Scripture, concerning the necessity, nature, and glory of the Redeemer's undertaking, and obedience unto death upon the cross: and this suggests further motives to humble submission, admiring gratitude, and cheerful acquiescence in the will of God. The worth of our immortal souls, the evil and desert of sin, our ruined condition as sinners, and the unavailing nature of all earthly possessions or distinctions, with various other interesting subjects, are most emphatically enforced by Emmanuel's cross. Thus, while induced to use every means of securing our salvation; we cannot but grow more indifferent to subordinate interests, and better satisfied with a low and afflicted condition. In this school St. Paul learned contentment amidst his multiplied sufferings: yet were we placed in his situation we should have far better reasons for our dissatisfaction, than we have been hitherto able to alledge.

Neither must we forget, that the believer feels himself to be an habitual pensioner on the Lord's mercy and bounty. He owns that he has no resources in himself: he can neither earn nor buy any thing, but indeed owes an immense debt of which he cannot pay the smallest part. He sues continually for pardon, through the sacrifice of the divine Redeemer, who bare the wrath due to our sins, that his salvation might consist with the honour of the law and government of God: and he is a constant suppliant at the mercy-seat of his offended Sovereign, expecting invaluable blessings from his royal bounty. He lives by faith; "Christ is made of God to him wisdom, "righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." From his fulness his wants are continually supplied; and he experiences, that his prayers are answered, his strength renewed, his hope encouraged, and his heart comforted, by waiting upon the Lord. And shall a criminal thus favoured be dissatisfied? If he yield to murmurs or impatience under the common troubles of life, his inconsistency can only be equalled by his glaring ingratitude.

"Being justified by faith we have peace with God "through our Lord Jesus Christ." When thus reconciled, we are admitted into a covenant of friendship; "and truly our fellowship is with the Father, "and the Son." In proportion to our faith, we enjoy peace of conscience, and the privilege of bringing all our cares, fears, sorrows, wants, and temptations to him by humble prayer; "casting all our care on "him who careth for us." We become interested in all "the exceeding great and precious promises"

of the gospel, and that oath by which the new covenant is confirmed; "that we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the "hope set before us." We are assured, that "all "things work together for good to them that love "God, who are the called according to his purpose:" and these considerations must powerfully tend to produce inward tranquillity, and that peace of God which passeth all understanding.

At the same time the godly man, in the exercise of faith, sees and acknowledges the hand of God in all the events of life. While we employ our thoughts on men or second causes, we become fretful and peevish: but when we view trials and injuries as the appointment of God, and realize his wisdom, righteousness, and truth in them, our hearts are rendered quiet and submissive. "It is the Lord, let him do "what seemeth him good." "The Lord gave and "the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of "the Lord." "The cup which my Father hath "given me, shall I not drink it?" Such are the effects of regarding our abode, provision, employment, and even our crosses and sorrows, as appointed by our reconciled Father; and welcoming them as salutary medicines, or necessary though painful operations, intended for our highest advantage. Nor is this exercise of faith ever wholly separated from the happy experience; that our confidence is warranted; and our expectations answered; for in numerous instances we find those things, which seemed most against us, eventually conducive to our present comfort and future advantage.

It would engage us too long to pursue the subject into its various particulars. Reverential fear, admiring love, spiritual worship, well regulated passions, holy affections, with every hope and earnest of heavenly felicity, might easily be shewn to promote genuine permanent contentment.—On the contrary, whatever men may pretend or imagine, "the wicked "are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose "waters cast forth mire and dirt. There is no peace "saith my God for the wicked." Poets and novelists have beautifully described contentment, and have often charmed their admirers into a momentary oblivion of their sorrows: but this has made way for subsequent dissatisfaction, with every situation and employment in real life. And all men of information know very well, that many of those very writers have rankled with envy and discontent, because the publick has not rewarded their ingenuity with liberality proportioned to their self-estimation!—The citizen fancies that contentment dwells in rural obscurity; the rustick concludes that it may be found in the splendour and pleasures of the metropolis. Courtiers *pretend to think*, that this pleasing companion is inseparable from retirement: the poor erroneously imagine, that it may be found in palaces. Britons amuse themselves with descriptions of Arcadian groves: the Arcadians probably conclude, that none are so happy as the inhabitants of this favoured isle.— But pride, ambition, an uneasy conscience, resentment, disproportionate or disappointed expectation, the insipidity of enjoyment when novelty ceases, the common troubles of life, and the dread of death, render men dissatisfied

and uneasy, in every place and station, from the throne to the cottage. They who have it in their power, are continually shifting from one place and pursuit to another; and such as are excluded from this privilege, envy, grudge, and murmur. The world resembles a number of people in a fever, who relish nothing, are always restless, and try by incessant change of place or posture, to escape from their uneasy sensations; but all their efforts are in vain. Does not this single consideration prove, that godliness is the health of the soul, and that without it there can be no abiding contentment?

II. Then we enquire, in what respects godliness with contentment is great gain.

There are certain ends, for which especially men desire riches.—They suppose the coveted acquisition would add to their present comfort;—secure them against many future disasters;—furnish materials for future enjoyment;—prove an advantage to their children;—enable them to confer benefits on their friends and relatives;—and put it in their power to be extensively useful. Perhaps all the *reasons*, for which men pursue riches, may be referred to these heads: for when avarice becomes so extreme, that money is coveted without any regard to its use, it degenerates into a kind of deplorable insanity.

But it may easily be shewn, that godliness with contentment answers every one of these purposes, far better than any increase of wealth. The wisest of men, who perhaps also was the wealthiest, says experimentally, "When goods increase, they are increased that "eat them; and what good is there to the owners

"thereof, saving the beholding of them with their "eyes?"* It is undeniable, that increasing riches ensure additional cares, encumbrances, and dangers, rather than any accession of enjoyment. "The grounds "of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:" but he was as much embarrassed about securing his abundance, as his poor neighbours were about paying their rents or maintaining their families. Nor was he the only man, who has viewed his treasures with anxious enquiries; What shall I do? where shall I secure them from danger?—Designing men find their advantage in paying court to the wealthy, and employ their ingenuity to impose upon them. Thus they are often surrounded with sycophants instead of friends: and even friends become suspected; for the cordiality of confidence is undermined by repeated deceptions, till universal suspicion damps all social intercourse, and destroys the comfort of the most cordial attachments.

Nor does the rich man enjoy any pleasure with higher relish than formerly: he soon loses the exhilaration of new acquisitions and improvements: he has less to hope and more to fear than other men: his abundance and leisure often excite him to improper indulgences: his situation feeds the distempers of his soul; and in proportion as wicked passions predominate, true enjoyment languishes. Something unpossessed, or unattainable, still makes him exclaim, "All "this availeth me nothing:" "Mordecai will not bow "to me:" "Naboth will not sell me his vineyard!"

* Eccles. v. 11.

While the attempt to obtain the coveted object, or revenge the imagined affront, opens the door to new crimes and miseries.—No wealth can exclude pain, sickness, the loss of friends, or death: and the most prosperous are often consumed with terrors, by the foreboding of calamities. Peace of conscience and hope of future bliss cannot be purchased, and the way, in which the wealth of ungodly men has been acquired and employed, render the thoughts of giving an account of their stewardship unspeakably tremendous.

Perhaps there is no delusion so general, or so easily detected, as the opinion that increase of wealth implies an increase of enjoyment.—Where is that man, who has risen from a bare competency to great affluence, that can honestly say, he has proportionably augmented his happiness? And what numbers confess that their prosperity has been disappointment, and "that all is vanity and vexation of spirit!"

But it hath already been shewn, that true godliness is inseparable from contentment: that it affords cordials in affliction, doubles the enjoyment of prosperity, and makes way for triumphant exultation in the prospect of death. The scripture sets before us many examples of believers, in the depth of poverty, in pain and sickness, bereft of friends or forsaken by them, insulted by persecuting enemies, conversant with stripes and imprisonment, and daily expecting a painful death; who have nevertheless been full of comfort, and have manifested a satisfaction of soul, which made them rather the objects of congratulation than condolance: nor are similar instances wholly unknown at present. But who can conceive a man under the

wrath of God, with a guilty conscience, the slave of his domineering lusts, and the sport of his restless passions, to be easy or comfortable in any situation? Godliness therefore does more towards making a man happy, than all other gains and advantages combined together.

But is not wealth a security against future disasters? Is it not a resource in sickness or old age, when trade declines, or when publick calamities deprive men of the ordinary means of subsistence?—In some cases it may be *a duty*, in many *allowable*, to make a moderate provision against such emergencies: but it is often impracticable, consistently with our various obligations to God and man; and in ten thousands of instances, it is done in a degree and manner, incompatible with the exercise of faith, and in a worldly selfish spirit. On the other hand, vast multitudes yield to impatience, distrust, envy and other tormenting passions, because they cannot succeed in their attempts to make such a provision.—But godliness is the best security against future distress. Riches still are *uncertain*, after every effort to change their nature, as late events have loudly preached to all the inhabitants of Europe. The most wealthy have no absolute security, that they shall not end their days in a dungeon, or an alms-house. Unforeseen failures often sweep away the property of the affluent: and in publick calamities it is suddenly transferred, to the amazement of beholders; while the rich and noble are reduced to abject indigence and dependence, and their palaces are occupied by the lowest of the people! In many cases, riches are considered as criminality; and the posses-

sors are proscribed for the sake of confiscations. When famine visits a land, the provisions that avarice had accumulated, are frequently seized by an enraged multitude: nay, often the innocent possessor of abundance falls a victim to popular fury. Thus "riches are kept for the owners of them to their hurt." And if they prove insufficient for security in such cases; what can they avail in the agonies of pain, at the approach of death, or in the day of judgment?

But he who possesses that *great gain*, which the apostle recommends, is liable to none of this uncertainty: "No good thing will the Lord withhold from "them that walk uprightly." "Put thy trust in the "Lord, and do good, dwell in the land, and verily "thou shalt be fed." "Seek first the kingdom of "God, and his righteousness, and all these things "shall be added unto you." "For your Father "knoweth what things ye have need of."—He hath all hearts in his hand, and all riches at his disposal. He needs not to work miracles (as in the case of Elijah,) in order to accomplish these promises: yet doubtless all nature would change its course, rather than God would disappoint an expectation warranted by his holy word. We know not indeed by what way our loving Father may see good in his infinite wisdom, to take us home to himself: but we are assured that every circumstance of that event shall be arranged in the most advantageous manner; and till the appointed period shall arrive, no famine can render us destitute, no pestilence can sweep us away; the sword of war, the fury of a multitude, or the malignity of persecuting tyrants, cannot reach us. We are safe, and ought to

be confident, though an host of men encamp against us: for "the Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of "Jacob is our refuge." "All things are ours, if we "be Christ's:" we need not fear, though the earth be removed. Death is our gain: and this single effect of godliness infinitely exceeds in value the ideal philosopher's stone, the power of changing inferior metals into gold. Even "the day of judgment, and perdi- "tion of ungodly men," will be the season of the believer's complete redemption, to which he may now look forward with joyful hope, "O Lord God of "Hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee."

But riches are valued as the materials of future enjoyment.—"Soul, thou hast goods laid up for many "years; take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry; but "God said, thou fool, this night shall thy soul be "required of thee."* Our present life is short and uncertain; "Man goeth to his long home." On our journey we only want enough to bear our expences: yet many a traveller groans, through a great part of the road, under the weight of an useless burden, which he must leave behind him on the shore, when he embarks for his eternal residence!—If riches yield little additional enjoyment during youth and health, they will fail still more in old age. Then the relish for every pleasure becomes languid, desire fails, the organs of sensation wear out; but the passions retain their impotent dominion, unless subdued by divine grace. "Can thy servant taste what I eat, or drink? "Can I hear any more the voice of singing men or "singing women?"† The aged sinner resembles the

* Luke xii. 16—21. † 2 Sam. xix. 35.

sapless trunk of an old tree; when the branches are lopped off or withered. He clings to a joyless life from dread of death: yet the thought, that he must soon die, will intrude, and interrupt his expiring comforts. He becomes a burden to himself, and often to others: and the greater his wealth is, the more reason has he to suspect, that many wait for his death with concealed impatience.

Alas, and is this all!—The sanguine youth, the active man of business, look forward, in scenes of peril and fatigue, with the cheering expectation of affluence or preferment; and of tranquil enjoyment in declining life, as the reward of intense application. But how great is the disappointment even of the successful! Most of the candidates terminate their course, before the expected season of repose, or languish out their lives in pain and sickness: the highest prize in this poor lottery has been described: while an eternal state is unprovided for! "Vanity of vanities, vanity "of vanities! saith the preacher, all is vanity.

"But the hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." The consistent Christian will not greatly regret the loss of pleasures which he has long comparatively despised: for he has resources in communion with God and the consolations of the Holy Spirit. Even if poor in this world, he commonly engages the cordial affection of some valued friends, whose society and attention solace the eve of life. Bodily pains and the loss of relatives are rendered tolerable, by faith and humble resignation; while the near approach of death and the prospect of heavenly joys reconcile his mind to transient sorrows

and separations. Past experience of the Lord's faithfulness and mercy inspires gratitude and confidence; which are rather increased than impaired by the consciousness of his own unworthiness.—"His outward "man decayeth; but the inward man is renewed day by day." Consolation often abounds when flesh and heart are failing. Thus he meets death with composure, and then enters on that "fulness of joy, which "is at the Lord's right hand for evermore." And is not godliness with contentment great gain?

When the lovers of this present world are silenced, in respect of these reasons for desiring increasing wealth; they excuse their conduct by pleading their families: and doubtless we ought to endeavour, that our children may be provided for, and enabled to maintain themselves, when we shall be taken from them.—But the desire of advancing them, much above our own station in the community, is injurious to them, both in respect to their temporal comfort, their character for prudence and good behaviour, and the interests of their immortal souls. How can any one greatly labour to enrich his children, if he do not himself idolize riches? How can he vindicate such an attempt, who believes the words of Christ; "It is easier "for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than "for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God?" But a pious education, an edifying example, many fervent prayers offered by religious parents for their children and with them, and the little spared from superfluous expences to relieve the indigent, constitute a treasure of superior value: while habits of industry and frugality, the result of right principles, will, by the

blessing of God, be far more advantageous, than ungodly riches, inherited with the encumbrance of the crimes with which they have been acquired.

Neither can wealth enable a man to be useful to his friends and relatives, in any way of degree, that may be compared to the advantages derived from godliness. To be capable of conversing in a pious and prudent manner with our acquaintance, of exhibiting religion before them in an amiable example, of recommending them to the Lord in our daily supplications, and of using divers means to render them wise unto salvation; when accompanied with uniform endeavours to serve them in their temporal concerns, will render us far greater blessings to them, than superior affluence could do.—And though men flatter themselves with the imagination, that they should do much good, when they are grown rich: yet supposing the best, which rarely happens; the most liberal use of ungodly wealth, seldom compensates the effect of corrupt principles and a bad example thus varnished over.—On the other hand, the godly man, however poor, is a light in his neighbourhood and the salt of the earth. He restrains the vicious, encourages the drooping, promotes piety and righteousness, professes and adorns the gospel, and in all respects is a blessing to every village, city, or nation in which he resides.—The Lord preserved all who sailed with Paul in answer to his prayers: ten righteous persons would have preserved Sodom: and the scripture fully warrants me to say, that our national preservation hitherto is vouchsafed in answer to the prayers, and for the sake, of the pious remnant among us.—In all respects and in every view, "godliness

" with contentment is great gain," yea the greatest of gains; " It is profitable for all things; having the pro-" mise of this life and of that which is to come."

III. Let us then conclude with some practical instructions.

Many young persons, being brought in the way of religion, think that godliness may be very proper in old age; as at that time of life people have little to do, and have no relish for juvenile pleasures. They perhaps allow that it will sometimes be needful *for them* also: but they wish to defer the distasteful task to a more convenient opportunity. In the mean while, they purpose making a trial of the world; being determined not to believe that all is vanity and vexation, unless convinced by experience. The opinion, therefore, that religion is irksome and joyless, proves in this case a most fatal delusion of Satan. All desire *present* satisfaction; and few are willing to forego it for a distant and invisible felicity. Hence arises a procrastination that generally proves fatal. But could we convince men that genuine piety would best promote their present satisfaction; one great obstruction to the gospel would be removed. You, my young friends, have doubtless found already, that disappointment and disgust often succeed to sanguine expectation: be persuaded therefore, we earnestly intreat you, to regard those, who have dearly bought their experience, when they declare, that this will more and more be the case, as long as you seek that happiness in the world, which can only be found in God and religion. " Come" then, " taste and see, how gracious the Lord is; and " how blessed they are that trust in him." Make a

fair trial, whether peace of conscience and joy in God, be not preferable to turbulent mirth, with an aching heart and bitter remorse.

But are not religious people often melancholy and uncomfortable?—No doubt many who speak about religion, and live at open war with their convictions, are very miserable. Others, taking up distorted views of truth, and prematurely or disproportionately studying matters too deep for them, disquiet their minds and cast a gloom over their piety: while negligence, unwatchfulness, evil tempers, or cleaving to worldly objects, will render those uneasy, who fear God or have any tenderness of conscience. But these effects arise not from godliness, but from the want of it; and they would vanish, were the scriptures more implicitly believed and obeyed. We ought therefore to infer from these things, that we should carefully compare our religion with the word of God; and pray without ceasing, that we may be enabled to have our conversation as it becometh the gospel of Christ.

Perhaps some of you, who have neglected godliness, meet with continual disappointment in your worldly pursuits. Does not the Lord then say to you, "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which "is not bread? and your labour for that which satis- "fieth not?—Hearken diligently unto me—hear and "your soul shall live?"—Few of the numerous candidates for wealth, honour, or power, are successful: and the most assiduous application has only the probability of success: but the unfailing word of God ensures the blessing to all, that seek his kingdom and

righteousness in *the first place*, and in the way which he hath prescribed.

Are any of you who trust that you possess godliness, oppressed by poverty, sickness, or trouble? Seek after contentment, my brethren: seek divine peace and consolations with redoubled earnestness; and strive to serve God cheerfully in the humble duties of your station. Watch against envy and covetousness, and a repining disposition. Learn to pity such as have wealth without godliness, and to pray for them: and be very cautious what measures you adopt to mend your outward circumstances: for "they that will be "rich fall into temptation, and a snare and into many "foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in de-"struction and perdition,"—or "pierce them through "with many sorrows."*

Finally, let the rich remember, that they are only stewards, and entrusted with wealth for the benefit of others. Let me charge you then, my brethren of superior degree, that you "trust not in uncertain riches, "but in the living God." That you be "rich in good "works, ready to distribute, and glad to communi-"cate: that you do good to all men, especially to the "household of faith."—Fear above all things having your portion in this life: and remember, that of all your possessions, nothing is *your own*, but "godli-"ness with contentment," and such "things as ac-"company salvation." All else will soon be left behind. Happy then are they and they only, who have "chosen the good part that shall never be taken from "them."

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* 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

SERMON XI.

REVELATION iii. 15, 16.

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot: so then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

THIS chapter, and that which precedes it, contain a message from our blessed Saviour to each of the seven churches in Asia; which in one part or another, suit the state and character of all Christian churches in every age and nation. It is therefore added at the close of each epistle, "He that hath an ear, let him "hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

The message to the Laodiceans differs materially from all the rest; for the professed Christians in that city had degenerated far more than any of the others. They were become lukewarm, yet proud of their imagined proficiency: and the reproofs, warnings, and counsels of our Lord were adapted to this peculiarity of character and conduct.

We know that lukewarm water is exceedingly disagreeable: the stomach recoils at it, and we spit it out with loathing. Thus Christ declared that he would cast off the church of Laodicea with disdain and abhorrence. There might, however, be some individuals of a better character, though probably infected with the same disease; and others might be brought to repentance. For the sake of these, therefore, the message was sent: they were warned, rebuked, counselled, and encouraged; and we may hope that many derived special benefit. Yet the church at large seems to have degenerated more and more: so that, while those churches, which our Lord mentioned with approbation, continue in some poor remains to this very day: there has not for a long time been a single professed Christian at Laodicea! At present I purpose,

I. To describe the nature and symptoms of lukewarmness.

II. To explain the grounds of that decided abhorrence of it, which Christ expresses.

III. To add something by way of solemn warning and particular application.

I. We will consider the nature and symptoms of lukewarmness, both in collective bodies, and individuals professing Christianity.

It may here be proper to premise one observation, to prevent mistakes. When our advantages, opportunities, and obligations are duly considered; we may all be justly charged with comparative lukewarmness: and the more we become acquainted with ourselves, and experience the power of divine truth upon our

hearts; the keener will be our sensibility, and the deeper our abasement on this account. But this case is totally distinct from that of the allowed and self-sufficient lukewarmness of the Laodiceans.

The disease of which we speak is only found where some profession of religion is made. The irreligious world is not lukewarm. Persons of this character may say, 'We make no pretensions to piety or sanc-'tity; we seldom think about religion; it is a subject 'that never gives us any concern.' Then indeed you are not chargeable with *lukewarmness:* you are clear of that crime: but if you pretend to no religion, what do you pretend to? Do you profess yourselves children of disobedience and of wrath, and heirs of hell? Is this your meaning, your character, your expectation? For whatever you may suppose, these things alone belong to those, who avow that they disregard God and religion.

But leaving such men to their own reflections; we observe that lukewarmness pre-supposes the form and appearance of a church; and that, possibly, neither very erroneous in doctrine nor corrupt in morals. In like manner the lukewarm professed Christian may retain the form of sound doctrine, avoid gross vices, and continue in communion with some religious society: he may even manage so well, that no specifick charge can be substantiated against him; no foul spot be visible in his character; no proof brought that he has renounced his profession. He may observe in some measure all the forms of godliness: but he wants the spirit, life, and activity of religion.—We cannot say that he is dead: yet he resembles a deeply wound-

ed man, for whom great fears are entertained, even while symptoms of life seem discernible.

Ministers, who are conversant with the state of their flocks, generally class people according to their apparent characters, in their private judgment of them. Some are evidently in the broad way; others are thought more promising, at least they desire to be so esteemed. But among some favourable tokens, many things appear very exceptionable: we would hope the best; but "What meaneth this bleating of the sheep "and lowing of the oxen that we hear?" Something criminal or suspicious is observable in the shop or in the family: some duty is evidently neglected, or slightly performed; and this damps our fond expectations concerning them. Others are not wholly irreligious, nor is there any remarkable blemish in their conduct: but they are neither cold nor hot: they do not appear serious, active, or zealous! and therefore we grieve over them, and stand in doubt as to the event of their profession. But there are some of another description; who are "our hope, and joy, and crown of re- "joicing:" may God exceedingly increase the number of them! These are the ornament and credit of the gospel; from them the light shines with efficacious splendour: and their bright example, with the energy of their influence and fruitfulness, counteracts the pernicious tendency of loose profession to wound the interests of truth, and retard its progress.

But let us enumerate some particulars, in which lukewarmness especially discovers itself. This may be observed, in the conduct of persons professing attachment to the peculiar doctrines of the gospel in re-

aspect of the ordinances of publick worship, and all the means of grace. The lively Christian says, "I "was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the "house of the Lord." "O God, thou art my God, "early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee, "my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land "where no water is; to see thy power and glory, as "I have seen thee in the sanctuary: because thy lov-"ing kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise "thee." Hence you see him anticipating the opportunity of waiting upon God, as a man expects any season of pleasure and delight; and making preparation lest any thing should deprive him of the satisfaction he expects. He suffers not a trivial hindrance to prevent his attendance on religious duties; and if he cannot break through intervening obstructions, he finds it difficult to bring his mind into a due resignation to the divine will. He does not enquire how often he is *bound* to attend the house of God: but rather rejoices when an opportunity offers on any day, which he can embrace consistently with other duties.

On the contrary, the lukewarm come reluctantly to the ordinances of divine worship; and are secretly pleased, when an excuse, deemed sufficient, is suggested for absenting themselves. A visit or an invitation from a friend, some trivial business, a slight indisposition, or the inconvenience of unfavourable weather, are no unwelcome hindrances to their attendance at the house of God. The same also is observable in respect of the Lord's supper, in which the lively Christian delights to commemorate the Redeemer's love, unless his mind has entertained some miscon-

ception about it. But such frivolous excuses as keep the lukewarm from publick worship, operate still more effectually, in leading him to absent himself from the Lord's table: unless it be a convenient part of that form, by which he maintains his credit and quiets his conscience; for in other respects he regards it as a matter of indifference.

We may further observe, that lukewarm persons commonly consider the sermon as the principal object, and think little of joining with reverence and fervency in other parts of divine service.—They commonly therefore come late to the places of worship, and disturb the devotions of such as are more zealous. They are also ready to say to ministers, "Speak to "us smooth things," 'Discourse on soothing and 'consolatory topicks; avoid awful and distinguishing 'subjects, and do not offend the audience with plain 'dealing.'—Such persons are peculiarly attentive to the manner, the voice, and delivery of the preacher: if these be graceful and suited to their taste, they are more easily satisfied in other respects. Above all they recommend brevity, 'Let the sermon be short, 'the prayer short, and make haste to dismiss us.' For they are soon weary of an employment, so little congenial to their prevailing disposition. They attend from custom, or amusement, or to pacify conscience; they delight not in the sacred service, and are reluctant to be "detained before the LORD."*

But if this be the case as to publick worship, what can be expected in respect to family-religion? If this

* 1 Sam. xxi. 7.

be not totally neglected, it is very superficially and irregularly conducted. Business, engagements, amusements, or visitants, easily induce the lukewarm to omit it entirely; or it is hurried over at an unseasonable hour, when perhaps several of the family are half asleep. Thus the souls of children and domesticks are neglected: and every person of discernment and observation must be convinced, that, according to all human probability, the religion of such persons whatever it be, will die with them. Indeed the families of the lukewarm have few advantages above those of the irreligious: while they are led to believe, that an evangelical creed will suffice to bring a worldly man to heavenly felicity.

Some of the old divines have observed, that 'apostacy begins in the closet;' and the same may certainly be said concerning lukewarmness: for even when our hearts are truly engaged in religion, we find it difficult to maintain habitual fervour and devotion in secret duties. It is therefore obvious to conclude, that they who are cold and formal in publick and family-worship, must be still more remiss in private. This, however, falls not under observation, but the lukewarm cannot but be conscious of it. Indeed the grand difficulty of the Christian's course consists in duly attending to self-examination, meditation, and secret devotion, our sharpest conflicts with Satan and our own hearts will generally be about these duties. While all goes well with us in this respect, we shall be carried through trials and services with comfort and advantage; but when we grow negligent in secret, our publick conduct will after a time be less respecta-

ble and edifying. This is, as it were, the pulse of the soul, by which we may best judge whether it be healthy or otherwise. So that the difference between a lukewarm and a zealous Christian must here be peculiarly observable to a man's own conscience.

The two characters may also be discriminated by the company which they prefer. Business or incidental circumstances may carry the most zealous believer into the society of worldly men: but he goes among them from a sense of duty; he is out of his element and bears a cross all the while; and he feels a quick sensibility and a watchful jealousy, lest he should disgrace his profession, or sustain detriment from so incongenial an association. When the necessity ceases, he consequently returns to the society of pious persons; and he habitually says with David, "I am a "companion of all them that fear thee, and keep thy "precepts."—But the lukewarm finds numerous pretences for visiting and loitering among ungodly associates, and for joining in some of their vain amusements. Their profane conversation or frivolous behaviour do not render him very uneasy: and it happens unfortunately that he has some objection against every one of his acquaintance, who is strictly religious.—This man, though pious, is uncourtly or unpleasant in his demeanour; the other, on a certain occasion, said an impertinent thing; and the third hath given just cause of offence. Thus men of this character excuse themselves to their own consciences, as well as to others, while they separate from the company of religious people: and consequently they more and more approximate to the spirit and maxims of

their chosen companions. They yield to solicitation in one instance, and then say, 'What harm in this?' They go a little further, and urge the same excuse. They plead for conformity to the world in one thing after another, till almost every trace of distinction vanishes; and then regard it as a mark of a liberal mind to maintain no singularities, and not to thwart the humour of the company: till at length they often come within the immediate attraction of the whirlpool, and are swallowed up beyond recovery!

The lukewarm professor reverses likewise the maxims of the gospel, in the pursuit and use of worldly things. He *first* seeks prosperity or indulgence; and vainly hopes that "the kingdom of God and his righteousness" will be added to him, without any peculiar concern or exertion. If he can maintain a hope that he is *safe;* he has no regard for the honour of God, the interests of the gospel, the salvation of souls, or advancement in holiness. In order to maintain his confidence, he looks perhaps to some past experience of the power, which divine truth had on his heart and conscience: this he concluded at the time to be conversion, and he still endeavours to satisfy himself in the same manner; abusing some important doctrines of the gospel to support his hope, notwithstanding his present conduct. If spoken to on this subject, he feels, and probably expresses, great displeasure; but in other respects he is destitute of sensibility.—But the zealous Christian is very suspicious of himself, and bears patiently to have the ground of his confidence investigated. He is ready to say on such occasions, 'Have I not said or done

'something, which counteracts my earnest desire to 'glorify God my Saviour, and recommend his gospel 'to my fellow sinners? Have I not been betrayed into 'evil tempers or inexpedient indulgences, which may 'give others an unfavourable opinion of my religious 'principles? Have I not mis-spent my time, and 'neglected to improve my talents? Have I avoided the 'appearance of evil, and taken care that my good 'should not be evil spoken of?' These are constant subjects of self-examination and sources of humiliation to the zealous Christian, of which the lukewarm know scarcely any thing: for they seldom think of our Lord's words, "Herein is my Father glorified, that "ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

It might be supposed that persons, so deficient as to the grand essentials of Christianity, could not enjoy much comfort in religion; yet they frequently exhibit the appearance of high assurance and abundant consolations; for every good thing may be counterfeited. There are ways, by which men may conceal their lukewarmness even from themselves; and acquire a kind of intoxicating self-complacency. A man may be very zealous for some appendages of religion, while extremely languid about religion itself. He may contend earnestly for certain doctrines, or for some peculiarities of discipline and church-government; and defend his sentiments with great ability and fervour. His boasting, reviling, and bitterness, are indeed additional proofs that he is little acquainted with genuine christianity: yet the ardent zeal which he feels and expresses, in the cause of truth, as he

supposes, enables him to conceal his real character from himself.

There are, however, some who deceive themselves in an opposite manner. They call their lukewarmness *candour:* they contend for no doctrine or peculiarity, and this is *moderation* in their use of the word. Every sentiment is with them a matter of indifference: they allow every man without disturbance to hold his own opinion; hoping that all, or most of them, will be found right at the last; this they call *charity*, the principal grace of Christianity!—But in fact such men do not value the truth: and they impose on themselves by fair pretexts: while they prefer ease, credit, and interest to the glory of God and the cause of the gospel. The spirit of persecution is, (in these lands,) exceedingly abated, for which we have reason to bless God: but it may be questioned, whether this affected and idolized indifference about divine truth be not an evil of almost equal enormity. This fashionable way of thinking dignifies *lukewarmness* with the name of *candour*, secures it from censure, and teaches a man to be a Christian without offending the bitterest enemies of Christianity! But are not such men ashamed of Christ and his words, in this corrupt and evil generation? And will not he be ashamed of them, when he shall come in glory to judge the quick and dead?

Rashness and imprudence are often manifested, in contending for the truth once delivered to the saints: but shall we on this account be silent and satisfied, when Christianity or its leading doctrines is denied and vilified? Is there no profession of the name and

doctrine of Christ required from his disciples? Are the peculiar instructions of revelation become matters of no consequence with professed believers?—When, however these questions are answered, it may further be remarked, that these very *candid* men forget their placid moderation among zealous Christians; and frequently become warm, if not disdainful and bitter disputers, against evangelical principles!

I shall only add one more peculiarity of the lukewarm professor of the gospel; for the subject is almost inexhaustible. He is commonly distinguished by a proportionable measure of spiritual pride. Confident of his superior wisdom and attainments, he arrogates to himself, in almost every respect, the preeminence among his brethren. The apostle pointed out this symptom of the disease to the Corinthians, when he said, "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye "have reigned as kings without us.—We are fools "for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are "weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we "are despised."* Yet while they were thus puffed up, their glorying was not good; and the doctrinal and practical errors and evils, which had been sanctioned among them, were almost incredibly many and dreadful! The church at Laodicea also said, "I am rich, and "increased with goods, and have need of nothing; "and knew not that she was wretched, and miserable, "and poor, and blind, and naked;" which is the exact description of spiritual pride. So that this is one invariable symptom of lukewarmness, as well as a

* 1 Cor. iv. 7—10.

cause of its prevalence: for a high opinion of our attainments uniformly leads to something mean and grovelling, and "a haughty spirit goes before a fall."

II. Then we proceed to explain the reasons, for which our Lord expressed such marked abhorrence of lukewarmness.

When he said, "I would thou wert cold or hot; so "then because thou art lukewarm and neither cold "nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth," we cannot suppose he meant that such professed christians were always more wicked, or in greater danger of perdition, than apostates or notorious profligates: though considering their advantages, obligations, and ingratitude, they may be often in fact more heinously criminal. I apprehend, however, that our Lord especially referred to the dishonour done by the lukewarm to his name, and the mischievous consequences of their infectious and disgraceful example.— Every one knows, that a bad servant may do ten times more mischief, while he remains in the family, than he could do, were he dismissed from it: and in like manner lukewarm professors do far more harm to the cause of Christ, by pretending to religion, than they could do by openly renouncing Christianity. One Achan in the camp caused more trouble and loss to Israel, than all the hosts of the Canaanites; "Neither" says the Lord, "will I be with you any more; except ye de-"stroy the accursed thing from among you."*

Corrupt professors of Christianity have in all ages been the grand obstruction to its progress.—Mr.

* Josh. vii.

Brainerd, in the narrative of his mission among the Indians, observes that he had great difficulty for a long time, to erase from their minds a suspicion, that he had formed some design of injuring them under a pretence of preaching the gospel: so frequently had they been defrauded by nominal Christians! This is the case, in one way or other, all over the globe: and the principal impediment to the success of the gospel in this land arises from the same cause. Lukewarm professors give irreligious people an unfavourable idea of evangelical doctrines. The prejudice against them is indeed naturally very strong, and men imagine they tend to licentiousness: but were there no loose characters among those that contend for these principles; were they all "a peculiar people, zealous of good "works;" this objection would soon be silenced, and men would be ashamed of thus calumniating their conscientious neighbours.—It is likewise well known, that we profess to experience joy and peace in believing; to find the ways of religion pleasant and delightful, and to choose rather to be "door-keepers in the "house of the Lord, than to dwell in the tents of un-"godliness." 'All this,' say worldly people, 'sounds 'very well; yet these devout believers frequently come 'to borrow a little of our pleasure, and seem as in-'tent as we are, in securing a portion of our good 'things.' How can such men be convinced that there is superior excellency or satisfaction in religion; while they see us cleaving to the world, and reluctant to renounce what we affect to despise?

The lukewarm are also the bane of those, who have been newly impressed with a sense of divine things.

Under the preaching of the gospel, thoughtless sinners are awakened to a concern about their eternal interests; their consciences become uneasy, and their minds attentive to instruction: they are convinced that many doctrines which once they disregarded are true and important, and perceive the necessity of renouncing sinful pursuits, and of separating from their old associates; and they become diligent in attending on the means of grace. But, if in this hopeful frame of mind, they come in the way of lukewarm persons, whose strong attachment to certain truths, and plausible address beguile their unexperienced hearts; they are easily seduced into false notions of *liberty*, not "in keeping God's commandments," but in disregarding them and they gradually lose their tenderness of conscience, and diligence in "labouring for the "meat that endureth unto everlasting life." They are now taught, that strictness in duty and self-denial deduct from the freeness of divine grace: and various insinuations of this kind poison their minds with prejudices against the ministers and Christians, among whom they were first excited to enquire after salvation. Thus numbers, who apparently set out well, by means of an unsuspecting attention to persons of this description, obtain a false peace, and finally settle among formal, disputatious, or antinomian professors. These are "the little foxes that spoil the vines" just when the tender grapes begin to be formed; and thus give most poignant grief to faithful pastors, while they witness, but cannot prevent, the perversion of those, who they hoped would be their rejoicing in the day of Christ.

But indeed the preachers of the gospel are themselves more exposed to temptation from the lukewarm, than from all other men whatever. We have like passions with our neighbours: and when we have forfeited the friendship of the world by adhering to the truths of the gospel; we are reluctant to meet also the frowns of religious people. Yet unless we stand firm against the insinuations of Laodicean professors, and venture their keen reproaches and calumnies, we shall not deliver more than half our message; we shall separate the practice from the doctrines of Christianity; and pass over, in general and inoffensive terms, those very subjects, which the state of our congregations require to be most fully and plainly enforced. And as lukewarmness commonly prevails more among the wealthy than the poor, our danger is very great: for their favour is both agreeable and advantageous, and their disapprobation exposes us to serious inconveniences, and often threatens great distress. Thus ministers lie under strong temptations to "shun declaring the "whole counsel of God," to "keep back some "things profitable to the people," to speak softly and timidly, to call this prudence and candour; and perhaps to join in censuring such as are more faithful to God and the souls of men. Either such cases are not unfrequent in this metropolis, or I greatly mistake the meaning of the scriptures, and that of the words and actions of mankind. We should, however, seriously consider the apostle's words, "If I were a "man-pleaser, I should no longer be the servant of "Jesus Christ."

In these and many other ways the lukewarm disgrace the gospel and retard its progress: they weaken the hands, disconcert the measures, and even ruin the simplicity of the ministers of Christ; while they damp the ardour, or mislead the earnestness, of real Christians. Can we therefore, any longer wonder at our Lord's decided language against such pernicious characters? Let us then,

III. Apply the subject, in solemn warnings and particular exhortations.

Our blessed Saviour seems to address himself to the Laodicean church, to the following effect. 'Thy 'lukewarm spirit and conduct are so contrary to the 'design of my religion, and the obligations conferred 'on my disciples, so dishonourable to my name, and 'so injurious to mankind; that I am determined to 'give an awful lesson to all other churches, by casting 'thee off with contempt and abhorrence: I will there-'fore deprive thee of all thy abused privileges, and 'no longer leave thee the name or form of my holy 'religion.' In like manner, my friends, whenever any kingdom, city, church, or congregation becomes like the Laodiceans: it will surely and speedily be deprived of its religious advantages, the candlestick will be removed out of its place; and this will be accompanied with other tokens of divine indignation. Thus interpreted, the words are indeed awfully prophetical: and when lukewarmness becomes general in any church, however distinguished or denominated, it is a certain prognostick of approaching judgments, either spiritual or temporal.

But the application to individuals is more immediately the province of the preacher. We do not indeed say, that every person, infected with this disease, is a hypocrite and will prove an apostate: but we affirm most constantly, *that the case is awfully dangerous.* "Let no man deceive you with vain words:" let none persuade you to consider this as a trifling matter. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new "creature, old things are passed away; behold all "things are become new." He has not only adopted a new creed; but he has received a new heart, and leads a new life: he "is created in Christ Jesus unto "good works."—How then can it be possible for a man to know that he is in Christ, unless he be conscious of this change, and manifest it in his whole disposition and conduct? Will any one say, he knows himself to be in a state of acceptance, because he has a strong impression that this is his privilege; because texts of scripture were brought to his mind to assure him of it; and because he has had many comfortable seasons under religious ordinances? If this spirit and practice do not at all accord to that of the Christian, as described in the oracles of God, ought he not to conclude that "Satan, transformed into an angel of "light," has deceived him: and that he builds upon the sand, by hearing the words of Christ, and not doing them? And how can he know, but that the storms and floods of death and judgment will sweep away his baseless edifice, with most tremendous destruction? They who call Christ, Lord, and do not the things that he says; even if they perform many wonderful works in his name, and receive extraordinary gifts

from him, will at the last day be compelled to "de-"part as workers of iniquity:" and what will then become of their anti-scriptural confidence?

The tares and the wheat must grow together till the harvest; the wise and foolish virgins will form one company till the coming of the Bridegroom; and guests who have not the wedding-garment may remain unnoticed, till the King come to see them: but the final discrimination, with its eternal consequences, will be dreadful to those, who had a name to live, and yet were dead.

Supposing, however, a man's lukewarmness not fatal; yet the uncertainty and the apparent danger of his condition are sufficient to excite great alarm and distress. If he be saved it will be "as by fire:" and what a gloomy prospect, what terrors and remorse upon a death-bed, are before him? These are the only tokens for good, of which his case can admit: for, unshaken confidence at the hour of death, succeeding an evidently lukewarm profession, proves that a man is given over to a strong delusion. Remember then, and may the Lord impress it deeply on every heart! that consternation and anguish, when death approaches, form the brightest prospect of the lukewarm Christian. And is this the provision you are making for that awful crisis? Is this your intention when you yield to indolence, temptation, and the seduction of bad examples?

You may probably, my brethren, censure my address as harsh and severe, but I hope you will observe, that it is far below the energy of reproof and warning, employed by the loving Saviour himself

yet he spake to those, among whom some persons seem to have had a few feeble sparks of grace, as fire covered and almost extinguished by the ashes.

But some perhaps continue to quiet their minds, by thinking that they make no pretensions to religion, and are not therefore concerned in the rebuke. Let me however demand of you, whether you have not been "baptized in the name of the Father, and the "Son, and the Holy Ghost?" have you then openly renounced your baptism, and abjured Christianity? Or do you expect to be called Christians? If you do, this implies a profession of religion, however unmeaning and hypocritical: and your indifference about these subjects proves you the most lukewarm of all that bear the name of Christ. And is this your confidence? or do you intend to plead this before the tribunal of your Judge? Would not such an excuse then prove before men and angels, that you had "crucified Christ afresh and put him to open "shame?" and that you had "done despite to the "Spirit of grace," by a course of conduct diametrically opposite to the religion which you professed?

Should these solemn reflections excite any of you seriously to enquire, what you ought to do, the answer is obvious. Consider the salvation of your souls as your grand concern: forego or postpone all other pursuits, rather than suffer them to retard your course in seeking an interest in the Saviour of sinners. Be diligent, earnest, and persevering in attendance on all the means of grace. Repent, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance: separate from the world with all it's sensual pleasures and stupifying diss[illegible]nd seek your present happiness, as well

as future safety, in the favour and service of our gracious God and Father.

If you doubt whether all this be necessary, I appeal to the Law and to the Testimony. Search the scriptures: see whether they do not require us to give the Lord our hearts and devote ourselves entirely to him; and whether the language of Christ, concerning self-denial, renouncing the world, enduring the cross, labouring and striving to enter in at the strait gate, be not much stronger than any thing here stated. If any of you should not be able to reconcile these passages to your views of salvation by grace; be assured that your views are unscriptural; and beg of God to open your understanding, that you may more clearly discern the truth as it is in Jesus. But beware of indolence and partiality in reading the scriptures: do not select a few passages, and pass over the rest, as unsuitable to your system, or uninteresting to you; for this springs from *lukewarmness*, and tends to its rapid increase.

But are any of you convinced, that you have hitherto been infected with this Laodicean spirit, and almost ready to tremble for the consequences? Let me call your attention to the subsequent part of our Lord's address to such lukewarm professors. He condescends to say even to them, "I counsel thee to buy "of me, gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be "rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, "and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; "and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou may-"est see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; "be zealous therefore, and repent."

Think then frequently and intensely on eternity and its infinite importance: meditate seriously on the death of Christ; the design, manner, causes, and effects of it; the instructions conveyed and the obligations conferred, by that great event.—Pray earnestly for the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, which alone can prevent or cure lukewarmness, and maintain the life and power of godliness in the soul. Examine particularly every part of your disposition and conduct: be willing to know the whole of your case as it really is.—Withdraw from the company of the lukewarm, and associate with zealous christians: and never admit a doubt, but that the more fervent, diligent, and fruitful you become, the greater will be your peace and comfort in life and death, and the more abundant your gracious recompence in the realms of blessedness.

We have all of us, my brethren, considerable cause for humiliation in this matter; and have need to redouble our diligence, in using all these means, that we may make progress, and grow in grace. But while the Lord says to all, "Behold I stand at the "door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and "open the door, I will come in to him, and will "sup with him, and he with me:" he adds for the encouragement of those, who are fighting the good fight of faith, perhaps with conscious feebleness and many fears, "To him that overcometh will I give to "sit down with me upon my throne: even as I also "overcame, and am set down with my Father on his "throne. He then that hath an ear let him hear what "the Spirit saith unto the churches."

SERMON XII.

MATTHEW V. 16.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

OUR blessed Lord just before his ascension into heaven, thus addressed his apostles: "All power is "given unto me in heaven and in earth: Go ye there-"fore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the "name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy "Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatso-"ever I have commanded you."* Hence we learn, that there is a measure of instruction which precedes an intelligent profession of the gospel, comprising the first principles of the doctrine of Christ: and that there is also a more particular and exact instruction, by which ministers should endeavour to form the judgment and direct the conduct of believers, in all

* Matt. xxviii. 18—20.

the several parts of Christianity. This distinction ought to be carefully remembered; that we may not suppose, the practical exhortations given to believers supersedes the necessity of regeneration, repentance, and faith in the Son of God, as numbers seem to think; nor yet deem it inconsistent with the purest evangelical views, to explain particularly, and inculcate most earnestly, the several parts of our duty to God and to our neighbour.

In the Sermon on the mount, our Lord first shews, in the several beatitudes, that happiness principally depends on the state of the heart: and then addressing the disciples, in the presence of the multitude, he said, "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt "have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? "It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out "and trodden under-foot of men." Christians, as scattered over the earth, ought to communicate a purifying savour of piety and righteousness, and thus to prevent the increasing depravity of the human race: but graceless preachers and professors of the gospel are the vilest and most hopeless of men.—"Ye are," says Christ, "the light of the world; a city set upon "an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a can-"dle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, "and it giveth light to all that are in the house." True Christians, placed in different families, villages, streets, cities, and nations, diffuse the light of divine truth, received from the Sun of righteousness, in their several circles. This also renders them conspicuous: their tempers, words, and actions will surely be observed and exactly scrutinized. Nor were they

enlightened from above, in order to be immured in cloysters, or to retire into deserts, like lamps put under a bushel: but it is the Lord's will, that they should resemble candles placed on candlesticks in the midst of a room, to give light to every part of it. Therefore "let your light so shine before men, that they "may see your good works, and glorify your Father "which is in heaven."—It may be proper for us,

I. To consider the persons, to whom this exhortation is especially addressed.

II. To examine more fully its import, And

III. To state the object, which we should aim at in complying with it.

I. The persons to whom the words are especially addressed.

Some expositors seem to confine the exhortation to the apostles, or to the ministers of the gospel, exclusively. But though the words are peculiarly proper and energetick in this application: yet, it is evident that all Christians are, in their own circle and measure, "lights in the world;" and all who profess Christianity may be exhorted to act consistently with their avowed character. In other parts of scripture similar exhortations are addressed to believers in general. The evangelical prophet, viewing the church as a disconsolate female sitting in darkness upon the ground, thus encourages her, "Arise, shine; for thy light is "come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. "For behold the darkness shall cover the earth; and "gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise "upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee: "and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings

"to the brightness of thy rising."* When the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ illuminates the church; then she arises from the dust, reflects the bright beams of the Sun of righteousness, and shines as a light to the Gentiles. The gospel is sent "to "give light to them that sit in darkness and the "shadow of death, to guide their feet into the way "of peace:" "To open their eyes, and to turn them "from darkness to light, and from the power of Sa- "tan unto God:" and when these effects are produced, men "are made the children of light and of "the day," and are exhorted to a consistent deportment.† St. Paul addresses the Philippians in words very similar to those of the text: "Do all things with- "out murmurings and disputings; that ye may be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without "rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse na- "tion, among whom ye shine," (or "shine ye,") "as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life, "that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have "not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." And St. Peter uses language to the same effect; "Ye are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy na- "tion, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth "the praises of him, who hath called you out of dark- "ness into his marvellous light."‡

But we need not multiply proofs in so plain a case. The apostles derived a primary splendour from Christ, the Light of the world; and their light shone before

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* Is. lx. 1—3. † Luke i. 79. Acts xxvi. 18. Eph. v. 8—14.
‡ Phil. ii. 14. 16. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

vast multitudes with peculiar lustre. The ordinary pastor diffuses the same light in his circle, and according to his measure: and the meanest Christian has his little influence and a few observers, among whom too his light may be made to shine. Even nominal Christians, being favoured with the light of truth, are inexcusable, in proportion to their advantages, in not receiving and communicating the inestimable benefit. For "this is the condemnation, that light is come into "the world, and men love darkness rather than light, "because their deeds are evil."

This may suffice to shew, that we are all concerned in the exhortation: for in our favoured land, and our peculiar situation, we have every advantage, for aiming to "let our light shine before men:" and if we do not, "we have no cloke for our sin;" so that it will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than for us.

II. We will then examine more fully the import of the exhortation.

God hath made other men his instruments in communicating to us the light of the gospel; and we should desire and endeavour to impart the benefit to others also: though we may seem rather lamps in the street, or candles in the room, than luminaries in the firmament of heaven. The means to be used for this purpose may vary, according to our several employments, abilities, and relations in life; but we all ought to have the same habitual design of bringing our neighbours and friends to the knowledge of God and themselves; the holy law, and the gospel of salvation;

the way of peace and the path of duty; and all other things which pertain to evangelical piety.

In order to accomplish this purpose, it is requisite that we make an explicit profession of our faith; that it may be understood what doctrines we believe, on what foundation our hopes are builded, and what we think concerning the person and redemption of Christ. We ought to avow our expectations from him, and obligations to him; that it may be perceived, on what account we deem ourselves bound to love him more than our greatest secular interests, or our dearest earthly friends; and unreservedly to keep his commandments. This profession is absolutely necessary to evince the sincerity of our faith; "With the heart "man believeth unto righteousness; and with the "mouth confession is made unto salvation."* And "Whosoever shall be ashamed of the Son of man, "and of his words, in this adulterous and sinful ge-"neration; of him also will He be ashamed, when "he cometh in the glory of the Father with the holy "angels.†

This profession is indispensably demanded of Christ's disciples, in order that they may "let their "light shine before men," and diffuse the knowledge of divine truth in the world; without yielding to the dread of shame, reproach, or the most cruel persecution. It is not indeed expedient, forwardly to declare our peculiar sentiments, in all places and companies, without some special reason, or favourable opening: but if regard to character, or other secular motives

* Rom. x. 10. † Mark viii. 38.

render men so reserved in this matter, that their neighbours, friends, and relations remain, in great measure, strangers to their religious principles; their sincerity may well be questioned: for this is a direct refusal to render to the Lord the glory due to his name, and to recommend his holy religion to mankind. And even if their conduct in some respects be suited to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour; the observers are left to ascribe it to other causes: and thus an opportunity is lost of evincing the excellent tendency of evangelical truth.

This profession of our faith should especially be made, by attending on the ordinances of God, according to the directions of his holy word: and this also forms an important method of "letting our light shine "before men." In the primitive times, when a Jew or Gentile began to attend on the preaching of the gospel; and when, professing "repentance towards "God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ," he was admitted by baptism into the visible church; when he associated habitually with Christians, statedly joined in their publick worship, and commemorated the love and sufferings of Christ at his table: he avowed himself the servant of the one, living, and true God, and the disciple of the only-begotten Son of God. This conduct would be fully understood by his former companions, and he might expect contempt, reproach, or persecution, as the consequence. We indeed live at a time, when most men in our land *choose* to be be called Christians: and such a variety of discordant opinions are maintained by the professed disciples of Jesus, that the mere circumstance of attending pub-

lic worship is no explicit avowal of our peculiar religious sentiments. But it is known that in some places, the mystery of the Trinity, the perfections of God, the righteousness of his law and government, and the wisdom and sovereignty of his providence, are maintained. Connected with these doctrines, man's accountableness to his Creator and Governor, a future judgment and a state of eternal retributions; the fallen condition of the human race, the evil and desert of sin, the justice of God in the condemnation of sinners, and his free mercy in their salvation, are strenuously insisted on: and the person, redemption, and mediation of Emmanuel, Jesus the Son of God; regeneration and renewal unto holiness by the Spirit; repentance and fruits meet for repentance; justification by faith alone; love to the Saviour constraining to devoted obedience; and patient continuance in well-doing animated by the hope of eternal glory, are the principal topicks, to which the attention of the auditors is called. These things are evidently enlarged upon in some congregations, and not in others: and if a man be convinced that they are the doctrines of scripture, he ought seriously and statedly to attend at some place of worship, answering to this description; avowing that his conduct is the result of examination, conviction, and regard to the authority of God. In doing this, not only hearing the sermons, but joining in every part of the service with reverent devotion, and associating with those who hold and adorn the same principles, he will make a very distinct and intelligible profession of his faith: and in bringing his family, and others whom he can influence, to attend on the same ordinances: he may "let his light shine

"before men," and exhibit an edifying example to his neighbours. To render this the more impressive, he should not only appropriate the Lord's day to this purpose; but embrace opportunities of attending on any day when it does not interfere with other duties: coming early, and shewing in his whole deportment, that he takes delight in the worship of God, and in hearing his word. Such a conduct tends exceedingly to draw men's attention to the gospel, and to promote vital godliness in the world.

It may further be observed, that all these ends are more decidedly answered, when the believer, after mature deliberation, statedly attends at the same place of worship, than when he wanders from one to another: for thus he sets an example of constancy in his attachment to the truths and ordinances of God; and he more effectually ensures the attendance of his family. Perhaps it may be added, that this conduct indicates a more healthful state of soul, and best promotes "growth in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord "and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Our light should also shine before men, by instructive and pious conversation. "The mouth of the "righteous speaketh wisdom and his tongue talketh "of judgment:" and it is remarkable, that the most opposite effects are ascribed to the tongue in the sacred scriptures. The psalmist calls it "his glory:" and Solomon declares, that "the mouth of a righ-"teous man is a well of life;" "the tongue of the "just is as choice silver;" that "the lips of the wise "feed many;" and that "the tongue of the wise is "health."

On the other hand, "The tongue is an unruly evil, "full of deadly poison:—it is a fire, a world of iniqui- "ty;—it sitteth on fire the whole course of nature, "and is set on fire of hell."* The fact is indeed undeniable, that the gift of speech, when abused, is the grand instrument in the propagation of atheism, infidelity, impiety, blasphemy, heresy, licentiousness, discord, and every other evil, through private circles and large communities, all over the earth. Yet this same gift, under the influence of divine teaching and holy affections, is also principally instrumental in diffusing the light of the gospel among mankind: not only by publick preaching; but by the private instructions of parents and masters, and by familiar conversation. The speech of prudent zealous Christians, being "seasoned with salt," being pure, pious, and affectionate, "ministers grace unto the hearers." It is therefore emphatically true, that "life and death "are in the power of the tongue;" "for out of the "abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." If then we be the disciples of Christ, and partakers of his grace, we shall, after his example, "from the good "treasure of our hearts bring forth good things." For even if we keep our mouth, as it were with a bridle, from all corrupt discourse; but do not embrace opportunities of profitable conversation; we shall be found guilty of burying our talent in the earth.

All indeed have not the gift of properly introducing religious topicks in mixed companies, where they are too generally unwelcome, however prudently and sea-

* Jam. iii.

sonably managed: but every man has a little circle, in which he may speak with freedom on the great concerns of salvation. Most persons have relatives, and many have families, among whom they are peculiarly bound to communicate the knowledge of the gospel. There are also seasons, in which almost any one will endure the serious and affectionate introduction of religious subjects; especially in times of peculiar affliction, or when death hath visited his house. In some companies a man is, as it were by common consent, called to take the lead in discourse, and may select his subject: and in most situations some opening will be found for a serious remark, which may be afterwards recollected, if it do not at the time introduce further conversation. The event of such reflections frequently give us reason to say, "A word spoken in "due season, how good is it!" And upon careful examination it will be found, that far more good is done in this way, than is in general supposed.

An objection, however, will naturally arise in the mind of many, from the consideration of the aversion and contempt commonly expressed for this kind of conversation. But it is certain, that the rules, prescribed by the Lord himself to his people, could not be reduced to practice, without exciting the same disgust and reproach.* Even the conduct of Christ must be involved in the same censure: for he hath set us an example of this duty, and also of the manner in which it ought to be performed. In fact, the opposition of men, who have no habitual seriousness in

* Deut. vi. 6—9. xi. 18—21.

religion, rather recommends, than forms an objection to pious discourse: and surely we ought not to neglect any part of our duty from that "fear of man "which bringeth a snare!" "Thus saith the Lord,— "hearken unto me, my people, who know righteous- "ness, in whose heart is my law: fear ye not the re- "proach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings: "for the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and "the worm shall eat them as wool: but my righte- "ousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from "generation to generation."*

They, who timidly and cautiously keep silence on these subjects, who leave men in ignorance and under delusion, even among their own acquaintance; and make no effort to enlighten them with saving truth, lest they should be censured and stigmatized with some reproachful name, must act in direct contradiction to this solemn admonition. Whereas a prudent and suitable attention to this duty forms one of the most efficacious means of diffusing the savour of truth and piety, in families and neighbourhoods; and of opening a door of usefulness to those who labour in the word and doctrines.

There are indeed many vain talkers, who disgrace the gospel; disregarding relative duties and every rule of propriety, by an ostentatious zeal and officious boldness in disputing about doctrines; while it is often too plain that the truth has little sanctifying effect upon their own hearts. It is therefore peculiarly incumbent upon us to ask wisdom of God, in order to

* Isaiah li. 7, 8.

a right performance of this duty; and to be very careful that our religious discourse be recommended by the ornament of a consistent behaviour in all other respects. This is especially the way to "let our light "shine before men." Thus Peter, exhorting Christians to "have their conversation honest among the "Gentiles: that whereas they spake against them as "evil doers, they might by their good works, which "they should behold, glorify God in the day of visi-"tation," inculcates the duties of subjects to their rulers; "for," says he, "so is the will of God, that "with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance "of foolish men." He then states the duties of servants, even to severe and froward masters; adding, "for what glory is it," (what proof of grace or recommendation of the gospel) "if when ye be buffet-"ed for your faults ye take it patiently? But if when "ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, "this is acceptable with God; for even hereunto ye "were called." Afterwards he exhorts "wives to "be in subjection to their own husbands, that if any "obey not the word, they may without the word be "won by the conversation of the wives." And having mentioned some other subjects, he thus concludes the exhortation, "Having a good conscience, that "whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil doers, "they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good "conversation in Christ."*

In like manner, magistrates, masters, husbands, parents, children, and all others, have various relative

* 1 Pet. ii. iii.

duties to perform for the common benefit: and if they be known to profess the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, which are generally accused of tending to laxity of morals, their conduct will be severely and minutely scrutinized. But when believers study to understand and aim to practise the duties of their several relations, in all respects more exactly than before; when they habitually give up their own humour, interest, or indulgence, provided conscience be not concerned, to oblige and serve those that are most prejudiced and unkind; and when this conduct is adhered to with meek perseverance, notwithstanding discouragements and ungrateful returns: then the excellency of evangelical religion is exhibited in the clearest and most affecting light. In this manner we ought to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all "things."

A conscientious exactness, as to every part of our conduct in the ordinary transactions of life, is likewise indispensably necessary: that they may be conducted with the strictest integrity, veracity, sincerity, and punctuality. We ought to "let our moderation be "known unto all men:" it should be evident, "that "our conversation is without covetousness;" and nothing ambiguous or suspicious should be observable in any of our dealings. A harmless and inoffensive deportment also is peculiarly necessary: we ought to keep at a distance from intermeddling in other men's affairs; from slander and discord; and from every word and action, which may prove injurious to the interest, peace, reputation, relative comfort, or ease

of any other person; as far as this can be done consistently with other duties.

An evident disposition to kindness, benevolence, and compassion, is another ornament and recommendation of the gospel. Nor is affluence, or extensive liberality, requisite in order to diffuse this benign light around us: provided our exertions bear some proportion to our ability. A loving spirit may be manifested in a narrow sphere, by a continual attention to little incidents; and by such beneficent actions, as are within the power of every man, whose heart is properly disposed.

These tempers ought to be associated with forbearance and gentleness under insults and injuries, a readiness to forgive repeated and most trying provocations, and persevering endeavours to "overcome evil "with good." And when the believer is also willing to acknowledge, without reserve, the mistakes and faults, into which he hath been betrayed; and to make suitable concessions and amends to all, whom he hath in any respect offended; "his light shines be-"fore men," in a very resplendent manner. Patience and resignation also, in those trying circumstances, which excite others to peevishness and rebellious murmurs; cheerful contentment at a distance from those pleasures, which most men deem the solace of life; moderation and regard to expediency in the use of things lawful; indifference about distinctions, preeminence, or applause; and discretion in the management of secular affairs, contribute to recommend, and consequently to diffuse, the light of divine truth.—This is more especially the effect of a dili-

gent improvement of our talents, according to our rank in life, or our situation in the church; by employing wealth, authority, influence, genius, learning, and every endowment, with a steady aim to promote the cause of true religion in the world, and to render mankind wiser, holier, and happier, by every means we can devise.

By a combination of these dispositions, and an habitual regard to every part of our conduct, according to the brief hints here given; avoiding extremes, rashness, harshness, and affected singularity; endeavouring to unite a courteous obliging behaviour with religious constancy and fortitude; and studying the proprieties of our several stations, we may, I apprehend, comply with our Lord's exhortation, and "let "our light shine before men."

III. Then, we proceed to consider the object, which we ought to propose to ourselves, in attending to these duties.

It hath been hinted, that our light should shine *before men*, and not at a distance from human society. They who quit the active scenes of life to which Providence has called them, that they may cultivate piety in privacy and retirement, too much resemble such soldiers, as decline the combat, and refuse to face danger or endure hardship in the service of their country. Some employments indeed are absolutely irreconcilable with a good conscience: but when this is not the case, it is generally the believer's duty, to "abide in his calling." Christianity suffices to teach every man, from the monarch to the slave, how to glorify God and serve his generation, by a diligent

and self-denying performance of the duties belonging to his station. And this is the best method of exhibiting before men the nature and efficacy of that remedy, which God hath devised for the disorders of this evil world.

Our Lord, in this same sermon, warns his disciples not to do their "works to be seen of men:" yet here he requires them to "let their light so shine before "men, that they may see their good works." Our actions, however good in themselves, are corrupt in their principle, if they spring from vain-glory, or are made known with ostentation, as if we sought human applause. But if we abound in the fruits of righteousness, and patiently continue in well doing, it will be impossible that our good works should be wholly concealed. Our Lord "went about doing good:" and he always shunned human observation, in his constant exercise of beneficence, as far as his circumstances would admit of it: yet his love and power were undeniable, and his fame spread abroad through the adjacent regions. Indeed almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, of which Christ spake afterwards, generally demand secrecy: but hypocrites especially seek glory by openly performing them: while the habitual tenour of a sober, righteous, and godly life, must be visible to those among whom we reside. Yet even here we ought to watch against every degree of ostentation.—But there may be occasions, in which the honour of God and the edification of our brethren, may require us to make known even those parts of our conduct, which should in general be concealed. Thus Daniel opened his windows, and prayed three times a day, as

a protest against the impious decree of Darius, or rather of his ministers; and the primitive Christians publickly sold their estates, to provide for the needy. And thus martyrs, in prison or at the stake, prayed singly in the most open manner, though at other times accustomed to retire into a closet.

The object which we are instructed to propose to ourselves, in making our light "shine before men," is this, "that they may see our good works, and glo-"rify our Father which is in heaven:" and our conduct may be regulated in most cases, by carefully examining how that end may be most effectually attained. But so far from our good works conducing *in any degree* to our justification before God, even the gracious recompence, promised to the fruits of the Spirit in the hearts and lives of believers, is not so much as mentioned in the passage before us. Higher and nobler motives are exclusively proposed, motives in which self-love is allowed no gratification, except we can find pleasure in glorifying God and doing good to men.

The people of the world have in general a very unfavourable opinion of evangelical doctrines. "The "preaching of the cross is to them that perish fool-"ishness;" and the plan of redemption seems to many of them irrational, inconsistent; and calculated to level all distinctions of character and capacity, and to militate against the interests of morality and science. They therefore commonly entertain a contempt for a man's understanding, when they discover that he has zealously embraced this religious system: and the disgusting conduct, or extravagant notions, of

too many who profess these doctrines, confirm these fatal prejudices, and furnish them with anecdotes and objections, with which to oppose the truth.—But when a man soberly avows his belief of the gospel, and "is ready to give a reason of the hope that is in "him, with meekness and fear:" when he discourses rationally on other subjects, and behaves with increasing propriety and consistency in all its various relations and engagements: the prejudices of observers gradually subside, and they begin to allow that his principles are not so intolerable as they conceived them to be. Finding, that, while he decidedly resolves "to obey God rather than man," he also is ready to serve or oblige others, when he can do it with a good conscience; and that his conduct when most exactly scrutinized, appears to the greatest advantage; and feeling perhaps that their own interest and comfort have been materially advanced by the change: they are prepared to receive more favourably any hint he may drop concerning the salvation of Christ; to read a book that he earnestly recommends, or to give the preachers of the gospel an occasional hearing. Thus many are led to an acquaintance with the truths of Christianity in the most attractive manner: their aversion and contempt are almost imperceptibly removed; and one after another is brought to the knowledge of Christ, and faith in his blood. Then a new light is set up to shine before men, that others may see his good works also, and be won over to join in glorifying our God and Father.

The Lord alone, it is true, can open the understanding and change the heart: but he almost always

uses means and instruments; and the pious example and zealous endeavours of Christians, as well as the preaching of the gospel, are blessed to the conversion of sinners. Every believer therefore should habitually design and endeavour to be useful in this manner, within his proper sphere; and propose it to himself as the grand object of his future life, to which all other pursuits ought to be subordinated, and if possible rendered subservient. He should watch over his tempers, words, and actions; and endeavour to regulate them in such a manner, that they may give the utmost energy to his attempts to recommend the gospel to his family and acquaintance. It should be his constant aim, to strengthen the hands of faithful ministers; and to shew in his own conduct, the reality, excellency, and beauty of pure religion, and its tendency to render men happy and useful.

When this is carefully and generally attended to, the number of real Christians will commonly be multiplied, the light of life will be more widely diffused; and the grain of mustard-seed will become a large plant.

We cannot reflect seriously on this subject, without lamenting, that there are but few Christians, even in nations professing Christianity.—The man, who hears an express command of Christ with contemptuous neglect, and habitually disobeys it, cannot reasonably expect to be thought his true disciple; yet, who can deny that immense multitudes of professed Christians do thus treat the exhortation contained in the text?—Let none then be offended with us, for distinguishing between true believers, and those who say

to Christ, "Lord, Lord, but do not the things which "he says:" for as he will shortly come, and make a complete and final separation; it is of the utmost consequence to every one, that he learn his real character and condition, before the door of mercy and hope be for ever shut against him.

Let each individual, therefore, seriously and impartially enquire, whether he have that inward evidence of having believed and obeyed the gospel, which arises from a fervent desire that God may be glorified in the conversion of sinners, and from an uniform endeavour to "let his light shine before men," for that purpose. If this be wholly wanting, the most exact creed and the strictest form of godliness will prove entirely unavailing. The Judge, at his appearance will silence all such pleas, by saying with awful indignation, "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." In proportion, as we are doubtful, whether this be indeed the ruling principle of our hearts and the plan of our lives; we should question whether our faith be living, and our hope warranted. We are, however, invited to come to Christ, as sinners for salvation: and if we really accept of this invitation, "giving diligence "to make our calling and election sure;" the subsequent change will constitute a 'witness in ourselves,' that we are partakers of Christ, and that his Spirit dwelleth in us.

Finally, my Christian brethren, we all need to be deeply humbled, that we have not "let our light shine before men," in that measure, and to that effect, which our peculiar advantages and obligation rendered incumbent on us. Let us then confess and lament our

unfruitfulness: and while we humbly crave forgiveness of the past, let us earnestly beseech the Lord for a larger measure of his grace; that we may henceforth "walk more worthy of God, who hath called us to his "kingdom and glory."

SERMON XIII.

JAMES i. 22—25.

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

THE apostle James seems to have especially intended his epistle, as an antidote to the delusion of those, who abused the doctrines of grace; and who, expecting salvation by a dead faith, considered good works as altogether superfluous. This may account for the remarkable difference, between his language and that of St. Paul; who was chiefly employed in contending against such as ran into the opposite extreme. Having

therefore shown that temptations and sins must not be ascribed to God, the unchangeable Giver of every good and perfect gift; and observed that the word of truth is the grand mean of regenerating sinners, and rendering them willing to consecrate themselves unto God: he gives some directions concerning the manner, in which men hear and receive the divine message, that it may be "in them an engrafted word, "able to save their souls." He then introduces the passage, which I have chosen for the subject of our present meditation, and concludes with these remarkable words; "If any man among you seem to be re-"ligious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth "his own heart: this man's religion is vain. Pure "religion and undefiled before God and the Father is "this; to visit the fatherless and widows in their afflic-"tion, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." The religion which God approves, when viewed apart from the principles whence it springs, and the ordinances through which it is produced and maintained, is chiefly manifested by self-denying kindness to men for the Lord's sake, and separation from all the pollutions of this evil world. "Now," says St. Paul, "abideth faith, hope, and charity; but the greatest of "these is charity."

The text viewed in this connexion, may give us an opportunity of considering,

I. The peculiar intent of revelation, and the purposes which it was evidently intended to answer.

II. The inefficacy of hearing without practising, to accomplish any of these purposes.

III. The nature, and sources of that fatal self-deception, into which numbers are in this respect betrayed.

IV. The contrast betwixt the mere hearer, and the practical student of scripture.

I. We consider the peculiar intent of revelation, and the purposes which it was evidently intended to answer.

"The Lord made all things for himself;" that in different ways they might manifest his glory. The inanimate creation, in every part, proclaims his wisdom, power, and goodness, and demonstrates his being and perfections.—"The heavens declare the glory "of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-"work." Each of the animal tribes answers the end of its creation, and enjoys all the felicity of which it is capable, except as involved in the consequences of our sins. But rational creatures should glorify their Maker in a higher manner; being formed capable of understanding the display he hath given of himself in his works, and of rendering him the reasonable service of adoration and obedience: in which, as connected with the ineffable enjoyment of his love, their genuine felicity consists. Yet, without at all considering the difference observable in men's characters, it is undeniable, that all "have forsaken the Fountain of "living waters: and have hewn out for themselves "cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water." This is the universal apostacy and idolatry of the human race: they are all "alienated from the life of God." None seek their happiness in knowing, loving, obeying, and worshipping him; but all, if left to themselves,

idolize the creatures, and expect felicity from the possession and enjoyment of them. It might easily be shewn that this is the prolifick source of all the vices and miseries of mankind, however varied and multiplied. The idolized objects of their several pursuits are unsuitable and insufficient for their happiness; moderate possession and use give not the expected satisfaction; and hence spring intemperance and licentiousness, with all their dire effects. The devotees of riches, power, fame, or pleasure become rivals, and interfere with each other: thus their malignant passions are excited, and they are tempted to the most destructive and atrocious crimes. The departure from God makes way likewise for rebellion, enmity to his perfections and government, and direct opposition to his commands and cause: and hence spring impiety, infidelity, atheism, superstition, every species of false religion, and every form of virulent persecution.

Thus man hath forfeited his felicity in the favour of God, incurred his awful displeasure, lost his own capacity of enjoying a happiness adequate to his desires, and rendered himself the slave of the vilest affections. And, as happiness is in its own nature one and unchangeable; he could by no means have avoided the most dreadful miseries, during the whole of his existence, had not his offended God brought *life* and felicity, as well as immortality, to light by the gospel.

It is therefore the especial intent of revelation, to make the one living and true God known to his apostate creatures, in the mysteries and perfections of his nature, as far as necessary; in the righteousness of his law and government; and in his readiness to show

mercy and confer happiness even on rebellious man. It was evidently the design of the Lord to bring us back to himself; to provide for the pardon of our sins, and to give us a title to eternal life, in a way honourable to his perfections; to reduce us to a proper disposition of mind, that we might thankfully receive these blessings and make due returns for them; to effect a cordial reconciliation between himself, the great and glorious Creator, and us rebellious creatures; and to teach us to love, reverence, worship, and obey him, that, being renewed to his holy image, we might enjoy true happiness for evermore in his favour and service.

Revelation was also intended to train up a people, who might be the instruments of God in promoting his cause among men; in alleviating and counteracting the miseries and mischiefs of the world; and in doing good to one another, till their removal to a state of perfect holiness and felicity. Finally it was designed to bring fallen men to that blessed state: that being made equal with the angels, they might for ever unite with them in the most sublime worship and delightful service of ther infinitely glorious Benefactor.

Now if these are special ends and purposes of revelation, as every impartial and diligent enquirer must be convinced they are; we may readily see,

II. The inefficacy of hearing without practising to accomplish any one of them.

But the importance of the subject is inexpressible, and demands a more particular investigation. The apostle supposes in the text, that the persons he addressed did hear the *word of truth*, and not false doc-

trine: for the more deeply men are impressed by erroneous sentiments, and the more entirely these become practical principles, the greater mischief is done; as such deluded persons are inflated with pride, buoyed up in self-confidence, and encouraged in gratifying their corrupt passions even as a part of their religion. These are the produce of the tares, which the enemy sows in the field while the servants sleep: but the self-deceivers, that abound where the good seed is sown, are such hearers as receive the doctrine of truth into a carnal mind by a dead faith, and pervert it through the artifice of Satan and the deceitfulness of their own hearts.—Our present business therefore lies with those, who statedly, or occasionally, attend on the real gospel of Christ.

It may here be proper to make a digression in order to mention some descriptions of *hearers only, and not doers:* that we may hold the mirrour to every individual, and help him to discover what manner of man he is. Many persons form a part of our congregations, who come from habit or constraint. Children or domesticks belonging to religious families, and many others in different situations, are accustomed to attend divine service, where the word of truth is preached. They know this is expected from them: and they submit to it, as a stated tax on their inclinations, which they pay for the sake of *coincident* advantages. Such persons commonly forget, that *they* are addressed by the preacher, and concerned in his instructions. They come and go, as it were, mechanically; but scarcely think of complying with the exhortations, which are most earnestly enforced. They

receive the seed by the way-side; and "the devil takes "it away, lest they should believe and be saved."—If this observation should reach the ears of any persons who answer to the description: let them remember, that for once at least *they* were particularly addressed; that the subject comes home to their case; and that not only the preacher, but the apostle speaks to them, as if by name, saying, "Be ye doers of the word, and "not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

There are likewise *speculating* hearers, who study religion, as other men do mathematicks: either to gratify curiosity and love of discovery; or because they hope to render it subservient to worldly interest and reputation; or vainly imagine that a sound creed is the one thing needful, the sure and the only passport to heaven. These men are often very severe on blind Pharisees, who think to be saved by a *form of godliness:* but they cannot see that a *form of knowledge* is equally worthless, and far more dangerous; because it produces a more desperate kind of pride and self-preference, for "knowledge puffeth up." They consider hearing, speculating, disputing, and critizing preachers and doctrines, as the whole of religion. Inactive notions produce no change of character: even the apparent morality or piety, which is sometimes connected with them, results from other principles; while the spirit and conduct, in many respects, are diametrically opposite to the real tendency of the doctrines for which they contend. Such persons, however, seldom persevere in stated attendance, where the *whole* truth is preached: and as the completion of their system is the main object with them; they often grow weary of hear-

ing even that partial statement, which they approve, and which they have fully understood.

Another description of hearers mistake *the means of becoming religious for religion.* They hear several sermons every week, from their favourite preachers: though perhaps they scarcely understand, and never bestow any pains to remember and practise, what they hear. Sometimes, they ground their confidence on attending such ministers, as are noted for distinguishing faithfulness; and, as they manage to endure this plain-dealing, they suppose themselves approved; for they understand that many hypocrites are offended by it. But at the same time, they never seriously think of examining themselves by the doctrine, or of following the exhortations, thus repeatedly inculcated.

We must by no means omit to mention those hearers of the gospel, who seek *entertainment* in places of worship, when conscience remonstrates against other amusements.—These are *amatures* of oratory, good language, and graceful delivery; they admire the flights of a fine and vigorous imagination: or perhaps they are pleased with close reasoning, or the discussions of an acute logician: though numbers of this class are as deficient in judgment, as in piety. They gratify themselves, however, by hearing preachers, whose talents suit their taste, whatever that may be. This employment sometimes agreeably fills up a vacant hour which might otherwise be tedious: and they *endure* even the truth for the sake of the *manner* in which it is delivered! Such persons attended Ezekiel. "Lo thou art to them," said the Lord to his prophet, "as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice,

" and can play well on an instrument: for they hear " thy words but they do them not."*

The *captious* hearer likewise requires to be noticed. He comes on purpose to criticize and find fault; to try every one's doctrine by his standard; to discover his own acuteness by detecting some error of the preacher; and to " make a man an offender for a word." He seeks for nothing but the bran or the chaff, and these alone he carries away. He means not to *learn*, much less to practice: and he must therefore be a hearer only, and not a doer of the word.—I would not, however, have you to conclude, that we deem our auditors obliged to credit all we say, or precluded from the free exercise of their own judgment. Men may diligently compare our doctrine with the scriptures, and differ from us in many particulars; while they edify by every sermon, and are doers of the word: for they may examine with sobriety, humility, and candour; and differ with reluctance and earnest prayer to be directed aright. But the captious hearer resembles a man, who turns with disgust from a plentiful table, because he dislikes some one dish. Nay, he goes to the feast, not to eat, but shew his delicate and fastidious taste by finding fault with the provisions!

Time would fail should we consider the *curious* hearer, who goes to find out what some celebrated preacher has got to say, perhaps that he may turn it into ridicule; the *procrastinating* hearer, who intends to practice when he has a more convenient opportunity; and many others, who might in like manner be arraigned and condemned.

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* Ezek. xxxiii. 30—34.

It must, however, be obvious, that all such persons fall short of every purpose, for which the word of God was mercifully given. "How do ye say, we "are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us? Lo, "certainly in vain made he it, the pen of the scribes "is in vain."* The word of truth continually calls them to consider their ways, and examine their hearts and lives; that they may become acquainted with their state and character; this they hear indeed; but continue careless and inconsiderate! They are warned to flee from the wrath to come; but they flee not: and they are invited to come to Christ that their souls may live; but they "refuse him that speaketh."—Wisdom thus expostulateth with them, "How long ye simple ones "will ye love simplicity, and scorners delight in their "scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at "my reproof: I will pour out my Spirit unto you; I "will make known my words unto you:" but "they "set at nought all her counsel, and despise all her "reproof."—They are commanded to repent, and to cast away all their idols and transgressions: but they cleave to their sins, and "after their hardness and "impenitent heart, treasure up wrath against the day "of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment "of God." They are exhorted to pray without ceasing; but they seem to say, "What is the Almighty that "we should serve him? or what profit shall we have "if we pray unto him?" They pay no practical regard to Christ, while he commands them, to "labour for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life;" "to "strive to enter in at the strait gate, to search the

* Jer. viii. 8.

"scriptures, and to take his yoke upon them." They hear indeed; and admire or object, as their notions are sanctioned or opposed; but if Christ be the Author of eternal salvation to those and those alone, who *obey him;* and if all they be his enemies, "who will not have him to reign over them;" such persons will as certainly perish as any description of sinners whatsoever. Nay, a partial obedience, which interferes not with their inclinations or interests, does not warrant them to expect a more favourable doom: "for he that "keepeth the whole law and offendeth in one point is guilty of all." According to the law itself a man is condemned for a single transgression; and according to the gospel, he who habitually commits one known sin, is adjudged a hypocrite and unbeliever. If this were not so, Herod might have retained Herodias; nor would it be necessary for us to part with the right hand or the right eye which causes us to offend.

Whether we consider revelation as intended to reconcile us to God, to make known to us the way of peace, to be the means of our renewal to holiness, to prepare us for glorifying God on earth, to fit us for enjoying his love in heaven, or to teach us to do good among men and serve our generation: it is evident that hearing without practising fails entirely of accomplishing any one of these purposes. This is so obvious in itself, and so constantly inculcated in every part of scripture, that it would be almost incredible that any man should be deceived by so palpable a cheat, were it not most lamentably common: nor can this fact be accounted for, but by allowing that "the heart is de-"ceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

III. Then we consider the nature and sources of that fatal self-deception, into which numbers are in this respect betrayed.

It is observable, that the apostle does not here warn us against the artifices of "Satan transformed into an "angel of light," or those of "his ministers trans- "formed into the ministers of righteousness." These indeed will never be wanting in subtle endeavours to beguile the souls of the simple: yet they can *fatally* deceive none, who are not disposed to deceive themselves.—It may also be remarked, that such persons seldom impose on other men. The ministers of Christ stand in doubt of them; nay, are often fully convinced of their awful delusion, and, with tears of affection, risk their displeasure by trying to undeceive them: but such endeavours are generally ascribed to harshness, prejudice, or calumny. They seldom deceive consistent Christians, as they may discover by the shyness and reserve of their conduct; while frankness and cordiality mark their social intercourse with more approved characters. Nay, the people of the world can commonly distinguish real pious and upright believers from mere speculating professors. Many of them court the society of such self-deceivers, while they fear meeting with persons of eminent sanctity; they can endure any creed, provided men's example sanction their spirit and conduct: "they are of "the world, therefore the world loveth them," while it hates those whom Christ hath chosen out of the world. There are, however, men that make no great pretensions to religion, who respect such as are consistently pious: yet they join with those, who honour

them by their hatred, in heartily despising him who is a hearer of the word, and not a doer.

But let us consider some of the methods, by which such men deceive themselves. The sacred scriptures ascribe the salvation of sinners wholly to *grace*, or free unmerited mercy; and declare that none of our own righteousness has contributed, or can contribute, to procure the inestimable blessing: now, some general notions of this fundamental truth help numbers to deceive themselves. Not considering salvation in its extensive meaning, as comprising the whole of our reconciliation to God and recovery to holiness; but confining their thoughts merely to pardon and justification, they infer that good works must *in all respects* be excluded from our views of the gospel. It is indeed most true, that "we are justified freely by the "grace of God, through the redemption that is in "Christ Jesus:" but it is equally true, that the will and power to perform real good works is an essential part of our salvation. "By grace are ye saved, "through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the "gift of God: not of works, lest any man should "boast. For we are his workmanship, created in "Christ Jesus *unto good works*, which God hath be-"fore ordained, that we should walk in them."— "The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, teaches "us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we "should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this "present world."*

* Eph. ii. 8—10. Tit. ii. 11—14.

This is the uniform language of the new testament; and it is most evidently rational: for the renewal of a fallen creature to holiness is as needful, important, and unmerited a favour, as pardon and the gift of righteousness by faith: but for want of attending to this, numbers take occasion from the doctrines of grace to deceive themselves. Indeed many use unscriptural expressions, which are extremely liable to misconstruction; and give a disproportionate statement of the truth: yet it must also be allowed, that the very words of scripture may in this manner be perverted.

Thus Peter observed, concerning the writings of his beloved brother Paul, that "in them were some "things hard to be understood, which they, that were "unlearned and unstable, wrested, as they did the "other scriptures, to their own destruction."*

The language of the sacred writers concerning *faith* is likewise most decided: "He that believeth and is "baptized shall be saved; and he that believeth not "shall be damned."—By faith alone, and by no other operation of the mind or action of the life, can the sinner be made partaker of the righteousness and redemption of Christ. But while numbers presumptuously use language diametrically opposite to that of holy writ; there are many who deceive themselves by a misapprehension of the scriptural doctrine. Various arguments have convinced them that certain opinions are true, and they dispute earnestly for them. Surely, say they, we *believe;* and if we believe, we have all things in Christ, "who of God is made to us, wis-

* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

"dom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemp-
"tion." Hence they conclude, that practice should only be insisted upon in general terms; and while secular motives restrain them from scandalous immoralities they imagine that all is well, and nothing further is required. But they do not duly consider the difference between dead and living faith: and that justifying faith works by love, purifies the heart, overcomes the world, and produces unreserved and zealous obedience. And while they give peculiar attention to St. Paul's argument concerning justification by faith, they overlook the account he gives of the holy fruits produced by faith; especially in the conduct of Abraham and Moses, and other ancient believers, as stated in the eleventh chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews.

The word of God gives us abundant reason to expect, that the true believer's experience will confirm and attest the sincerity of his faith. "He that believeth "on the Son of God hath the witness in himself:" "Having believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit "of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance." "The day dawn and the day-star shall arise in your "hearts."* The meaning of these scriptures, and many others to the same effect, is very important; and teaches us, that the real disciples of Christ experience such effects in their own souls, from believing the doctrines and relying on the promises of the gospel, as abundantly satisfy them, that the Lord is faithful to his word, and that he both comforts and sanctifies his people by the truth. But numbers deceive them-

* Eph. i. 13. 2 Pet. i. 19. 1 John v. 10.

selves by a counterfeit experience. They have been alarmed, have changed the ground of their confidence, have had their imaginations heated or delighted by impressions and visionary representations: they have recollected the promises of the gospel, as if spoken to *them* with peculiar appropriation, to certify them that their sins were forgiven: and having seen and heard such wonderful things, they think they must no more doubt their adoption into the family of God. They have also frequently heard all experience profanely ridiculed as enthusiasm: and this betrays them into the opposite extreme; so that they are emboldened to despise every caution, as the result of enmity to internal religion, and to act as if there were no delusive or counterfeit experience. But the event too plainly shews their awful mistake; and that they grounded their expectations upon the account given of the extraordinary operations of the Holy Spirit on the minds of prophets, rather than on the promises of his *renewing influences* in the hearts of believers. When therefore they lose the impressions with which they once were elated, they relapse nearly into their old course of life, their creed and confidence alone excepted. The seed of the word, which had sprung up, withers, because it hath no root: they are not doers, but hearers only, deceiving their ownselves.—But the seal of the Spirit, like that affixed to the melted wax, leaves an indelible impression; and the image of Christ will in some measure be discernible, in the temper and conduct of those who have received it, through all changes to the end of life.

We are but little acquainted with the real character and secret conduct of each other, except in the most intimate relations and connexions; especially in populous cities. We see men attend on publick ordinances, we hear from them, in occasional conversation, the language of believers, and we know nothing concerning them inconsistent with these appearances. It is our duty to love the brethren, and to speak comfortably to them. Charity hopeth all things, and thinketh no evil: we therefore behave to such men as brethren; and this circumstance helps many to deceive themselves. The self-flattery of the human heart is inconceivable, and its effects prodigious: so that numbers put the candid opinion of ministers or christians, who scarcely know any thing of them, in counterpoise against the accusations of their own conscience, respecting the secret sins which they habitually commit. They even persuade themselves that allowed crimes are of the same nature with the infirmities, which believers humbly confess and deplore: and thus they maintain a confidence in direct opposition to scripture, and call it *faith;* nay, they deem this a high attainment, and "hope against hope," in a sense, with which neither Abraham nor Paul were at all acquainted.

Mistaken notions of liberty likewise lead men into fatal delusions: for instead of counting the service of God perfect freedom, and seeking deliverance from the yoke of sin and Satan, from love of the world, and from the fear of man; they imagine liberty to consist in living according to their own inclinations, without remorse of conscience, or dread of consequences:

just as numbers can form no idea of civil liberty, unless they be allowed to indulge their selfish passions without restraint. When therefore we exhort them to submit to the easy yoke of Christ, and to serve him in holy obedience; they exclaim that this is *legal*, and leads them into bondage: and they choose such teachers as "promise them liberty, while they themselves "are the slaves of corruption."—These are a few of the innumerable ways, in which men deceive themselves, by hearing the word of truth without reducing it to practice.

But whence arises this fatal propensity to self-deception, in a matter of infinite importance? Our Lord answered this question, when he said "Every one that "doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the "light, lest his deeds should be reproved." The human heart is prone to idolize the world, and to seek happiness in the enjoyment of it; and is averse to a life of practical godliness. But when a man is at all acquainted with the doctrines of the bible, his conscience becomes an unquiet inmate, unless some way be taken to silence its remonstrances. Various methods have therefore been adopted of reconciling a worldly life with the hope of future happiness: and self-flattery, which palliates a man's vices, and enhances the value of his supposed virtues, is a powerful coadjutor in this attempt.—But among these plans perhaps no one is so cheap and convenient, as hearing and assenting to the gospel: if a man be able to persuade himself, that such a faith will save him. This requires less trouble and self-denial, than any other system: while it helps him to ascribe that decency of

conduct, which secular motives impose, to religious opinions; and to consider all his omissions and transgressions as defects which are common to believers. A superficial hearer of the word may thus easily suppose, that he is in the way of salvation, while he lives in habitual disobedience to the known commandments of God: and when the faithful address of a minister shakes this vain confidence; the man may be seduced to charge the blame on the doctrine, and to shrink from conviction by going to those places, where smoother and more comfortable things are spoken.—Could we therefore witness all that passes in the retirement, the family, and the dealings of those, who after a time forsake our ministry; we should perhaps not be at all surprised at losing them, though we must grieve to discover such awful self-deception.

These are the sources of this evil, which will certainly terminate in everlasting ruin, unless it be previously discovered and remedied.

IV. Then we consider the contrast here stated between the mere hearer, and the practical student of scripture.

The word of God, that perfect law of liberty through which the believer is freed from bondage and condemnation, is compared by the apostle to a mirrour; in which a man beholds the reflection of his person, and by which he may adjust every thing in his appearance after the most becoming manner. The mere hearer resembles one, who gives a transient look in this mirrour; but taking little notice of his appearance, and bestowing no pains to alter any thing in his attire, "he goes his way, and straightway forgetteth

"what manner of man he was."—Thus many give a slight attention to the truth, and get a transient glimpse of their own state and character: but they dislike the mortifying discovery, are uneasy under the fleeting conviction, and have no inclination for that repentance and conversion, to which the scripture calls them. They therefore try to believe, that approbation and assent may suffice, and that the gospel does not require practice. They go and plunge themselves into business or pleasure, and soon forget their convictions: and thus remain ignorant of their accumulated guilt and urgent danger, and strangers to regeneration, reconciliation to God, the life of faith, the sweet obedience of love, and all those "things that accompany "salvation."

On the other hand, the man, who stedfastly looks into the scriptures, comparing all his conduct, past and present, and even his thoughts, affections, tempers, motives, and words, with the holy law, who thus learns his whole duty to God and his neighbour, according to all his various relations and obligations; and who continues daily considering his ways, and contemplating himself in this faithful mirrour; will soon become acquainted with his own heart and character, and perceive his need of the mercy and grace proposed in the gospel. By persevering in this course of self-examination, without being offended by the discoveries he makes; he will speedily understand that he ought to humble himself before God, for sins more numerous than the hairs of his head: and experience will convince him, that he can neither atone for the least of his former transgressions, nor answer the

righteous demands of the divine law; nay, that he cannot truly repent, except by the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit. His daily efforts will bring him more and more acquainted with his sins of omission and commission, the defilements of his duties, the hidden evils of his heart, the strength of his depraved propensities, and the power of habits and temptations. These things will render him weary of attempting to "establish his own righteousness," or to change his own nature. He will now be capable of understanding the words of the apostle; "By the works of the "law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God, "for by the law is the knowledge of sin." The publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner," he will now most cordially adopt; and the nature, glory, and preciousness of the free salvation revealed in the gospel will be more and more unfolded to his view. Thus he will learn with increasing simplicity to plead the name of Christ in genuine faith; to come to the Father by him, and to rely solely on his righteousness, redemption, and mediation, for acceptance and eternal life.

In this manner the practical student of scripture, being justified by faith, and having peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, will make still further progress in the divine life. The convincing and enlightening influences of the Holy Spirit, through the instruction of the written word, will continually discover to him defects and defilements in his heart and conduct, which he had not before observed. Thus while he presses forward, and aspires after nearer and nearer conformity to his perfect rule; repent-

ance, faith, watchfulness, and fervent prayer, will become more and more habitual, and as it were natural to him. His heart will grow more humble, and his conscience more tender, his dependence on Christ more simple, and his gratitude for redeeming love more abundant, in proportion to the degree of his sanctification. These things will render him likewise more compassionate, tender, forbearing, and forgiving; more patient and self-denying; and more ready to encounter dangers and difficulties, in promoting the cause of Christ among his fellow-sinners. And as no absolute perfection can be attained on earth; and as he deems all faulty and deformed, which does not come up to the requirement of the holy law, and the spotless example of the Saviour; so no limits can be assigned to his discoveries and progress, during his continuance in this world.

This is the character described by the apostle, "he "is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word; and "he shall be blessed in his *doing*." He is made wise unto salvation, and shall "abound in hope by the "power of the Holy Ghost:" he shall find liberty and pleasure in the ways of God; be made useful to society, and a blessing to his connexions; and he shall "have an entrance administered unto him abundantly "into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Sa-"viour Jesus Christ."

No man who duly considers these things can doubt the practical nature and tendency of the gospel. Christ is our sole Foundation: but no one builds on that Foundation, except he hears his sayings, and does them. The practical hearer's faith is living; he is a

wise man: and this will appear to all the world; when the folly of those who build upon the sand by a dead faith, by hearing and not doing, will be exposed to universal contempt. Alas, my brethren, how numerous are such nominal Christians; "who call "Christ, Lord, yet do not the things that he says!" But unless the design of the gospel be answered in our hearts and lives, the gospel itself will increase our condemnation.

Are any of you then sensible, that your hearing has hitherto failed to influence your practice? Let me conjure you, by the love you bear to your own happiness, not to put off the alarming conviction, by saying, "Go thy way, at this time, when I have a con- "venient opportunity I will call for thee." It is not yet too late: "Now is the accepted time, now is the "day of salvation:" But you know not how soon the Master of the house may shut to the door; and then it will be too late to begin to say, "Lord, Lord, open "to us;" for he will silence every plea, and bid you "depart as workers of iniquity."

But have you, my brethren, begun seriously to practise what you know, and to enquire the will of God that you may do it? Blessed be the Lord, for his grace bestowed on you! Go on in this way, my beloved brethren; and even the most humiliating discoveries you make of yourselves, will serve to endear the gospel of salvation to you. "Then shall you "know, if you follow on to know the Lord:" "For "the path of the just shineth more and more to the "perfect day." The practice of duty will prepare your hearts for the reception of truth; by removing

those prejudices, with which the prevalence of carnal affections closes the understandings of the disobedient; and every accession of spiritual knowledge will have a sanctifying and comforting effect upon your hearts.

Finally, were we as desirous of having our souls adorned with holiness, as most persons are of decorating the poor dying body; we should certainly make continual discoveries of our remaining uncomeliness, and be thankful for assistance in such researches: and we should make daily progress in sanctification; by "putting off the old man, which is corrupt according "to the deceitful lusts, and putting on the new man, "which after God is created in righteousness and true "holiness."

SERMON XIV.

1 CORINTHIANS xiii. 13.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

THE apostle, in this remarkable chapter, shews the Corinthians, that the most splendid and useful of those miraculous powers, which they emulously coveted and ostentatiously displayed, were far inferior in value to sanctifying grace; yea, that when united with the deepest knowledge of divine mysteries, the most self-denying liberality, and the most vehement zeal, they were nothing without charity; and did not so much as prove the possessor to be a real Christian of the lowest order. He then describes charity, as a man would define gold, by its distinguishing properties, which are the same in a grain as in a ton; but the more a man possesses, and the less alloy is found in the mass, the richer he is.—And having shewn, that charity would never fail; whereas miraculous powers would cease, and knowledge itself would be swallowed up and lost in the perfect light of heaven, he adds,

" And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; " but the greatest of these is charity."—It is evident, that he meant to sum up, in these three radical graces, the grand essentials of vital Christianity, to which all other holy affections may be referred. But as the word *charity* is now used for one peculiar expression of love, which is equivocal, and may be counterfeit: it will render our discussion more perspicuous to substitute *love* in the place of it; it being well known that the original word is generally thus *translated*. I shall endeavour, therefore,

I. To consider separately, the peculiar nature, exercise, and use of faith, hope, and love.

II. To shew in what respects love is the greatest of the three; and how this agrees with the doctrines of salvation by grace, and justification by faith alone.

The subject before us, my brethren, is of the greatest importance, and often fatally misunderstood. Let me then beg a peculiar measure of your attention; and let us lift up our hearts to God, beseeching him to " open our understandings, that we may understand the scriptures," and be guided into the knowledge of his holy truth.

I. Let us consider separately the peculiar nature, exercise, and use of faith, hope, and love.

We begin with *faith*. That peculiar act of the understanding, by which we avail ourselves of information, in those things which fall not under our own observation, and which do not admit of proof in a way of reasoning, is called *faith* or *believing*. If we credit

testimony without sufficient grounds, we are unreasonably credulous: if we refuse to believe testimony, which has sufficient grounds of credibility, we are unreasonably incredulous. It is therefore extremely absurd to oppose *reason* and *faith*, as if contrary to each other; when in fact, faith is the use of reason in a certain way, and in cases which confine us to that peculiar exercise of our rational powers. *Believing* may be distinguished from *reasoning*, and in some cases opposed to it: but in opposing *faith* and *reason*, the friends of Christianity have given its enemies an advantage, to which they are by no means entitled.

It is evident to all observing men, that the complicated machine of human society is moved, almost exclusively, by that very principle, which numbers oppose and deride in speaking on religion. Testimony received and credited, directs the determinations of princes and councils, of senates and military commanders, of tribunals and commercial companies, in their most important deliberations: and did they refuse to act, without self-evidence, demonstration, or personal knowledge; all their grand affairs must stagnate. But human testimony, though often fallacious, is deemed credible: they believe, decide, and carry their decisions into execution.—In the common concerns of life too, we believe a guide, a physician, a lawyer, and even those who provide our food; and the incredulous sceptick in such cases must be ruined, or starved, or perish by disease.

But "if the testimony of man be great, the testimo-
"ny of God is greater." "The scripture is the sure

"testimony of God; making wise the simple."* It relates facts, which God hath attested; states doctrines which he hath immediately revealed; promises and assurances concerning the future, which he hath engaged to accomplish; and commands and ordinances, which he hath thus enforced with clearness and authority. All these things are intimately connected with our duty, safety, and felicity; they are made known for our warning, encouragement, and instruction: faith receives the information, and this excites and directs the believer's activity. We may *reason* soberly and humbly concerning the evidences of revelation, and the meaning of scripture: but when these points have been ascertained, our reasonings are at end; for either faith receives the testimony of God, or unbelief makes him a liar.

Faith strictly speaking is, 'the belief of *the truth;*' with the application of it to ourselves, and a perception of its importance, holiness, excellency, and suitableness to our characters and circumstances. It is the gift and operation of God: for many of the truths, revealed in scripture, are so contrary to our pride, prejudices, and worldly lusts, that no evidence is sufficient to induce our cordial belief of them; till our minds have been prepared by preventing grace. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of "God; for they are foolishness to him: neither can he "know them, because they are spiritually discerned."† True faith should therefore be sought by earnest pray-

* 2 Tim. iii. 15—17. † 1 Cor. ii. 14.

re; and lively gratitude is due to God from those that do believe.

Faith appropriates the declarations of scripture respecting things past, present, and future; whether they appear dreadful or desirable. The believer credits the testimony of God, concerning his own essential nature and perfections, and the righteousness of his law and government. In the same manner, he obtains information respecting the creation of the world, the entrance of sin and misery, the fall of man, the evil and desert of sin, the deceitfulness and wickedness of the human heart, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the future judgment, and an eternal state of happiness or misery. Men may conjecture and dispute on these subjects: but faith, receiving the testimony of God with the teachableness of a child, satisfies the mind and influences the conduct, as if we saw the things believed. It is therefore impossible, *thus* to credit these doctrines, and not take warning to "flee from the wrath to come." Faith must, in this case, produce fear of threatened punishment: and as it is always accompanied with some feeble discoveries of mercy; it will also in some degree soften and humble the heart to repentance, and excite earnest enquiries after salvation.

But we are especially called upon to believe the testimony of God concerning his Son. "This is the re-"cord, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this "life is in his Son: he that hath the Son hath life, and "he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." The numerous and decisive declarations of scripture on this subject have induced some persons to speak of

faith, as exclusively meaning a reception of Christ for salvation: and no doubt this is the grand exercise and use of it. Yet in fact, unless we believe many other revealed truths with true humiliation of heart; we never can believe in the Son of God in a saving manner. We may assent to the doctrines of grace, and abuse them; but we cannot understand their nature, glory, and suitableness to our case and circumstances.

True faith simply credits the divine record concerning the person of Emmanuel; his essential and eternal Deity, and his voluntary incarnation that he might be our Brother and Surety, "GOD manifest in the flesh:" his obedience of infinite value, and the atoning sacrifice of his death upon the cross; his resurrection, ascension, and intercession in the presence of God for us; his several offices of Prophet, Priest, and King; and all the various particulars, concerning his power, truth, love, fulness of grace, mediatorial authority, and future coming to judgment. This belief cannot be separated from a cordial compliance with his invitations, a thankful reception of him in all his characters and offices, an habitual dependence on him for salvation, and a constant application for all the blessings procured for us, by his sufferings and death. Thus we spiritually "eat his flesh and drink his blood;" which are "meat indeed and drink indeed:" and thus 'we feed 'on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.'

"To you that believe he is precious." In proportion to our faith, Christ becomes to us, "the Pearl of "great price;" and we grow more and more solicitous, lest we should come short of him and his salva-

tion. This renders us decided in renouncing other confidences, "counting all but loss, that we may win "Christ, and be found in him;" diligently using all the means of grace, observing the directions given us, and making every sacrifice necessary for the securing of this main concern. Joyful hope will animate us with most lively gratitude. Advancing knowledge and matured experience will render our dependence more simple; and, receiving continually from the fulness of Christ the supply of all our wants, he will become more and more glorious in our eyes and precious to our hearts: while increasing sanctification, and abundant diligence in the work of the Lord, will enhance our sense of obligation, without in the least deducting from our simplicity of reliance on him as our "Wis-"dom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemp-"tion."—"We are crucified with Christ; neverthe-"less we live: yet not we, but Christ liveth in us; and "the life that we live in the flesh, we live by the faith "of the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself "for us."*

True faith has likewise respect to the "exceeding great and precious promises" of scripture. These are sure testimonies of God ratified by all the engagements of the new covenant, in the blood of the great Mediator; and the promised blessings belong to all true believers, though they cannot always perceive their own title to them; and to them exclusively.

The doctrines and promises of scripture relate very

* Gal. ii. 20.

much to the person, offices, and influences of the Holy Spirit. If then we truly believe these divine testimonies, with application to our own wants, and perceive the value of these life-giving, illuminating, sanctifying, and comforting influences; we shall certainly depend on them continually.—Thus we shall *believe in* the Holy Ghost, and honour him together with the Father and the Son, as the triune God of our salvation.

"Faith is" likewise "the evidence of things not "seen." It perceives the hand of God, and hears his voice, in all the varied events of providence; it realizes his holy, heart-searching and gracious presence in all places; it penetrates invisible things; lays heaven and hell open to our view: contemplates the world of good and evil spirits with which we are surrounded; and looks forward to judgment and eternity, as just at hand. Thus it supplies the want of sight and sense. "We endure, as seeing him that is in-"visible."—"We look not at the things which are "seen, but at the things which are not seen." We set God before us in our daily conduct and conversation: we perceive his special presence with us in his sacred ordinances; we speak to him in prayer and praise; we hear his word of instruction and direction; we have "fellowship with the Father, and with his "Son Jesus Christ; we walk with God *by faith:*" we stand, we war, we run, we obey, and endure *by faith:* believing, we rely on God for strength, help, protection, support, and comfort according to his word; and thus are emboldened and enabled to face danger, resist temptation, renounce the world, bear the sharpest

sufferings, and persevere in the hardest services, to which we can be called.*

It is evident that faith alone can answer these purposes; and that no other grace of Christianity, however excellent and necessary, can supply its place. Faith alone can appropriate the instructions of scripture; form our relation to Christ, that we may be "made the righteousness of God in him;" seek supplies of every blessing from his fulness; rely on the faithfulness of God for the performance of his promises; supply the want of sight, and give nearness and certainty to invisible and eternal things.—But it is also evident that an assent to certain historical facts, or a system of inactive notions, or a groundless confidence of the divine favour, cannot be the faith of which such things are spoken. For this is a living and operative principle: it calls forth fear, hope, desire, aversion, love, gratitude, and every other affection of the soul, into most vigorous and abiding exercise; and by their combined or varied energies overcomes the world, the flesh, and the devil, fights a good fight, and obtains a most honourable victory.

We proceed next to consider the peculiar nature, exercise, and use of hope.

Hope is the expectation of future good, real or supposed. We may believe and expect what we dread and would escape: we may desire, what we despair of obtaining: but we hope for those things alone, which we desire and in some measure expect. In one form or other it is the chief solace of human life: no man

* Heb. xi.

is happy at present; but all hope for happiness, and pursue it according to their different notions. The hope and pursuit afford some pleasure, and keep the mind from preying on itself: but disappointment is certain to all, who seek happiness in worldly things, whether they be prosperous or unsuccessful.—There is also a religious hope, which is no less delusive, and even more certainly fatal: because the mistake is not discovered till it is too late to make a wiser choice. A warranted hope of happiness in the favour of our God is, however, secure from disappointment; and ensures present support and everlasting felicity.—The apostle exhorts us to "be ready always to give an "answer to every man, that asketh us a reason of the "hope that is in us."* But, while almost all we meet avow a hope of being saved: there are very few, that are able to give a solid reason for this hope: and if it be unreasonable, it must be presumptuous. The sinner who warrantably hopes for everlasting felicity, and for various blessings in this present world, could assign such reasons as follow, for the hope that is in him; if he possessed the gift of utterance, and could orderly arrange his thoughts. 'The scriptures,' he would say, 'have been proved to be the word of God, 'and I am satisfied on that head. They reveal the 'just and holy God, as merciful and gracious, for-'giving sin and saving sinners, through his beloved 'Son, whom he hath set forth to be a propitiatory sa-'crifice, and who "is able to save to the uttermost all "them that come to God by him; seeing he ever

* 1 Pet. iii. 15, 16.

" liveth to make intercession for them." ' This di-
' vine Saviour invites all that will come to him, and
' adds: " him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise
" cast out." ' I know myself to be a vile sinner, and
' I repent in dust and ashes. I am conscious that I
' renounce all other pleas, own the justice of God in
' my condemnation, and sue only for mercy through
' Emmanuel's blood;' " My soul longeth for God's
" salvation, and I hope in his word:" ' I desire to be
' made willing to part with all for Christ; and I pray
' for true faith, and stronger faith. I perceive some-
' thing of the nature and glory of God's way of saving
' sinners, and I approve of it as worthy of him and
' suitable to men; and I long to see and admire the
' displays of his glory more and more. I trust I have
' experienced in some degree that change of heart,
' that new creation, which the scriptures describe as
' accompanying salvation. My desires, conflicts, fears,
' sorrows, comforts, and state of mind coincide with
' what I read in the word of God, concerning his be-
' lieving people in former ages. I trust I do feel some
' measure of contrition, reverence, and love of God,
' love of Christ and his people, and other affections,
' to which I once was wholly a stranger; and it is my
' grief and burden, that I feel them no more, and am
' harassed by so many things contrary to the best de-
' sires of my heart. I long to serve the Lord with
' fervent zeal;' " I delight in the law of God after the
" inward man: but I feel another law,—warring
" against this law of my mind. I cannot do the things
" that I would:" ' and were it not for the mercy and
' grace of the Lord Jesus, this would make me most

'completely wretched. But I trust I do believe in 'him, and am interested in the promises made by 'him: thus I wait for increasing sanctification; and at 'length expect perfect holiness and happiness accord-'ing to that everlasting covenant, which God hath "confirmed with an oath, that we might have strong "consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on "the hope set before us."*

Thus the believer can give a reason for his hope: in general the word of God encourages the sinner to hope for mercy and grace; and in particular the work of the Holy Spirit on the believer's heart, "seals him "to the day of redemption," and gives him a special warrant to expect the performance of all the promises of God to his soul. It is the earnest, the first fruits, the pledge of glory: it is renovation to the divine image; and while the believer feels filial affections towards his reconciled Father, "the Spirit of adoption "witnesseth with his spirit, that he is a child, and an "heir, of God through Jesus Christ." In proportion as a man has a right judgment in these matters, and consciously experiences these influences of the Holy Spirit, and has grace in lively exercise; his hope rises to full assurance: but misapprehension, weakness of faith, sloth, temptation, and quenching or grieving the Spirit, darken his evidence and weaken his confidence. This good hope through "grace is obtain-"ed and preserved by holy diligence."† But presumption of any kind may be acquired and maintained by the slothful. The former prevails most upon

* Heb. vi. 16—20. † Heb. vi. 11. 2 Pet. i. 10.

strict scriptural self-examination, and is cleared up by an increase of spiritual knowledge: but the latter cannot endure close investigation; and would be destroyed by discoveries of the divine holiness, the excellency of the commandment, the evil of sin, and the real nature and tendency of the gospel. Genuine hope has many variations; it rises and sinks, like the mercury in the barometer; now it prevails and triumphs, and now it is shaken; and the possessor, not doubting either the power, truth, or love of Christ, is led to question whether he be a true believer, when he has been drawn into unsuitable tempers and conduct. But presumption is unfeeling: it resembles more the case of death than that of health; and therefore is generally invariable.

The true hope is living and active. "Every man, "that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, as the "Lord is pure." In proportion as it abounds, a man feels himself animated for every duty; and it is connected with the exercise of all other graces: "Hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God "is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost." But the hypocrite's hope is solitary and inactive: instead of stimulating him to exertion, it soothes him into indolence and self-indulgence, and he cannot be excited to diligence, unless affrighted with the dread of hell. His confidence is a vain expectation of safety and happiness, by a presumptuous reliance on the promises, without a cordial obedience to the gospel, and acceptance of its salvation.

The living hope of a Christian "is the anchor of "the soul, both sure and stedfast."—The anchor is

'completely wrete ... in its station, notwith-
'him, and am i... tempests; and it is gene-
'him: thus I wa... from driving, and running
'length expect ... the strand, and on rocks
'ing to that c... manner we have a station to
"confirmed ... tides of fashion, opinion, and
"consolatio... mptations of Satan and his agents,
"the hope ... world, and trials of various kinds,

Thus th... from it, to hurry us into some ruin-
in general ... within the reach of some tremendous
hope for ... but the hope of eternal happiness, and of
of the F... rdful for life and godliness, according to
"to th... promises of God; with the cheering earn-
warrar... icipation of these inestimable benefits, and
of Gc... coming short of them, keep us stedfast in
the ... and to our duty. Thus we are animated to
imag... present advantages, to endure hardships; to
war... temptations, to face persecutors, and to cleave to
"... Lord with full purpose of heart: even as the sol-
... the mariner, and the merchant, are emboldened
tic... excited to patience and perseverance, by the hope
ar... the desired compensation of their peculiar dangers
I... fatigues: for despair of success would in all these
... damp men's ardour and enervate their endea-
vours. This hope is peculiarly necessary in seasons of urgent danger or severe persecution, that the Christian may be rendered "stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; knowing that his labour is not in vain in the Lord." The sacred writers, therefore exhort believers to "hope unto the end;" and bestow much pains to exhibit the variety, excellency, and glory of the promised blessings, in the most striking and affecting manner.—

says our Lord, " and be exceeding glad, is your reward in heaven." " Our light n, which is but for a moment worketh for r more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." ssed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus rist, who—hath begotten us again to a lively hope;—to an inheritance incorruptible, and unde- filed, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven " for you."* " We are saved by hope, but hope " that is seen is not hope, for what a man seeth why " doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for what we " see not, then do we with patience wait for it."† " God,—who hath given us everlasting consolation " and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, " and stablish you in every good word and work."‡ " Now the God of hope fill you with all peace and " joy in believing, that ye may abound in hope by the " power of the Holy Ghost."§

These and many other scriptures shew, the import- ance of lively and abounding hope, in the Christian warfare. By faith we discern the promised good afar off; in fervent desire we embrace it; and in hope, rest- ing on the word and perfections of God, we patiently wait for it; midst discouragements, delays, conflicts, difficulties, and sufferings; for " It is good to hope, " and quietly to wait the salvation of the Lord." This hope is frequently called *trusting in God*, or *trusting in Christ;* and it implies that steady reliance on his power, truth, wisdom and mercy, which takes the

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* Matt. v. 12. 2 Cor. iv. 17. 1 Pet. i. 3—8.
† Rom. viii. 24, 25. ‡ 2 Thess. ii. 16, 17. § Rom. xv. 13.

soul off from trusting in men or creatures, and rescues it from all self-confidence. Expecting happiness from God alone, according to his word, the believer parts with or refuses present things, in expectation of better blessings in reversion; and waits the Lord's time for them, seeks them in his way, and prepares for the enjoyment of them by following after holiness, and abounding in every good work. He knows that no feeble attempt or intended good work shall lose its reward, however unsuccessful, or ill requited among men: this produces "the patience of hope," and is connected with submission, contentment, and cheerful perseverance in well doing; while the believer seeks for glory, honour, and immortality: even as the Lord Jesus, "for the joy set before him, endured the "cross, and despised the shame." It is therefore called "the helmet of salvation," and "the breast-plate "of hope:" for without it we are incapable of fighting the good fight of faith: and we uniformly find, that in proportion as genuine hope prevails, we are prepared to wrestle, labour, or endure hardship; and when greatly discouraged, we are heartless in every undertaking, and unfit for every service.

From first to last of our Christian course, hope must be as the anchor, the helmet, and the breast-plate of our souls. How firmly soever we believe the doctrines of revelation: yet unless we have a warranted and holy expectation of obtaining the various blessings proposed to us, we shall go on feebly, even in smooth and prosperous scenes; and we should faint in times of difficulty. The more assured this true hope is, the greater will be our constancy and diligence

in the ways of God: and while the presumptuous hope of the hypocrite is inefficacious and useless, often failing in life, and certainly expiring at death; the hope that hath been described, "is sure and stedfast:" it lays hold of the unfailing word of God; it is maintained by supplies of the Spirit of Christ, and encouraged by constant experience; and it will abide in its principle and exercise, till it is swallowed up in the enjoyment of heavenly felicity.

We now proceed to consider the peculiar nature, use, and exercise of love.

The apostle indeed in the chapter before us speaks principally of love to mankind; yet we cannot suppose, that he meant to exclude the love of God: but he considered the Christian's love to his brethren whom he had seen, as the most unequivocal evidence of his love to God whom he had not seen.* The whole scripture, however, authorizes, and requires us to speak fully upon this subject: and surely no rational man, acquainted with the sacred oracles, will maintain, that acts of benevolence, without regard to God, and separate from genuine faith and hope, is *that* love, on which the apostle bestows such high encomiums. No doubt *this* abides in the heart and in the church, united with faith and hope, and is inseparable from them. —The holy law requires us to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength; and this is written in the inward parts of the redeemed sinner, by the renewal of the Holy Spirit. He thus learns supremely to love, admire, and adore the glorious excellences of

* 1 John iv. 20, 21.

God: to seek his happiness in him; to thirst after him or rejoice in him, above all other things; to feel lively gratitude for his boundless mercies; to devote himself willingly to his service; to manifest an ardent zeal for his glory, lively joy when his name is honoured, and poignant grief when impiety and iniquity triumph; and fervently to pray, "Hallowed be thy name, thy "kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as in "heaven."

This love to God is particularly expressed in fervent affection to the Lord Jesus, "the brightness of "his glory, and the express image of his person." Through him sinners know, approach, trust, worship, and serve a God of infinite justice and holiness: and in his person and redemption the harmonious glory of all the perfections of the Godhead is displayed, more than in all his other works. It is indeed very remarkable, that every kind and degree of love which JEHOVAH claims by his holy law, is demanded for the Lord Jesus by his apostles and evangelists. So that, in supremely loving Christ, desiring, rejoicing, and glorying in him; thanking, praising, and adoring him; magnifying him in our bodies, whether by life or death; being "purified *unto him* a peculiar people, "zealous of good works," honouring and obeying him unreservedly; we evidently obey, honour, and love the Father, according to the requirements of his holy word. And this demonstrates that "He and the "Father are One," in the strictest sense imaginable.

The immense obligations, which redeemed sinners have received from the divine Saviour, render this love to him peculiarly reasonable and delightful: yet it is

not merely gratitude, or lively emotions of the animal passions. It is a rational choice of the Lord as our Portion and Salvation; an admiring love of every display of his perfections; and a disposition to delight in doing his will, and promoting the manifestation of his glory among men. It is therefore the spring and first mover in all spiritual worship and obedience, as well as the principal duty required from us. "This is the "love of God, that we keep his commandments; and "his commandments are not grievous." Under every dispensation, and in all possible circumstances, on earth, or in heaven, this must be the essence of true religion: and all external services are no further acceptable, than as they spring from love. Even the *fear*, which differs from profound reverence of that infinite excellency which we supremely love, though in the present state useful, yet diminishes as love gathers strength, and will cease when love shall be perfected.

This holy affection to our glorious Creator, Benefactor and Saviour, must be shewn by love to our neighbours and brethren. "Thou shalt love thy "neighbour as thyself:" these words briefly comprehend the whole law of God in this respect: and our Lord's parable, or narrative, of the good Samaritan, hath taught us, that every human being, whatever be his nation or religion, and however he may have acted towards us, is our *neighbour;* entitled to our cordial good-will, and our kind offices, when within our reach and in need of our assistance. He himself hath far exceeded the kindness of the good Samaritan, in assuming our nature, and saving us rebels and enemies by his suffering and death upon the cross; and in

both respects he hath said to us, "Go and do like-"wise."

"Love worketh no ill to his neighbour." This commandment therefore, if universally obeyed, would preclude all kinds and degrees of fraud, injustice, oppression, slander, and every other word and action, in the least injurious to any human being; yea, all hard thoughts and ill wishes, suspicion, resentment, envy, coveting, or selfishness. On the other hand love seeks the benefit of its object, and rejoices in his happines: if then we love our neighbour as we ought, we shall desire to promote his good in every respect, by all suitable means in our power. In proportion as our love abounds, we shall be ready to deny ourselves, to labour, and to incur expence, in contributing to his advantage. If we really love our neighbour as we *ought to love ourselves;* we shall seek his highest good in the first place, and aim to render all our kind endeavours subservient to his everlasting welfare. His happiness is of equal value with our own; his soul, life, ease, peace, and reputation, are as important as our's. We ought therefore to seek his good sincerely and earnestly; and to give up inferior interests and endure inferior sufferings, when we can thus preserve him from heavier distress, or procure for him superior blessings: provided it can be done consistently with the duties of our several relations in life.—We should love what is amiable, respect what is honourable, praise what is commendable, excuse what is excusable, bear with and forgive what is faulty, and put the best construction on what is doubtful, in our neighbour's conduct; and commiserate and relieve his dis-

tresses: exactly as we would that others should do to us in similar circumstances.

We are indeed more immediately entrusted by the Lord, with the care of our own lives and souls; and required to provide especially for our children and near relatives: and in ordinary cases, we may not be able to shew active love, beyond our own very contracted circle. But universal benevolence will dictate prayers for all men: and on particular occasions we are required to exercise self-denial, and in a measure suspend our kindness to those near to us, that we may avail ourselves of an opportunity to relieve and serve those who are more remote from us.

This love of our neighbour is enforced, under the gospel by other motives, and admits of other modifications, than are expressly mentioned in the law. Our peculiar relation and obligations to Christ require us to love his people, as our brethren, in an especial manner. "A new commandment," says he, "I give "unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved "you."* And St. John says, it is, "the old com- "mandment which was from the beginning:" and yet a "new commandment:"† that is, the old command enforced by new motives, and a recent example, and for other ends than formerly. They, whom we judge to be true believers, are entitled to our most endeared affection, most cordial complacency, tender sympathy and self-denying liberal assistance. "For- "asmuch as ye did it to the least of these my bre- "thren, ye did unto me." They should be our chosen

* John xiii. 34, 35, xv. 12. † 1 John ii. 7—11.

companions, our bosom-friends, and dearer to us than any earthly relative, as our brethren in Christ, the objects of his special love, bearing his image, devoted to his service, and fellow heirs of heavenly felicity. We should labour, "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the "bond of peace;" to preserve harmony among "all "that love the Lord Jesus in sincerity," however divided by external distinctions; to cast the mantle of love over their infirmities, and to shew an habitual disposition to cultivate peace with them, and do them good. "Hereby we know that we are passed from "death unto life, because we love the brethren;" for we are now especially attached to the very persons, whom we were naturally disposed to despise and dislike.—Alas, that this peculiar mark of Christ's true disciples should be so little conspicuous in his visible church!

A conscientious regulation of all our relative affections, and a performance of the duties resulting from them, are next required of us: and when these are attended to from evangelical principles, and according to the precepts of Christ; they are so far from interfering with our love to God and to our neighbour, that they constitute an important part of our obedience. Love to particular friends, and gratitude to benefactors should be so exercised, as to coincide with our general duty: all excessive attachments, as generally understood and celebrated, are partial, exclusive, and idolatrous affections; the love of a man's own image in another is person, self-love reflected, or the creature substituted in the place of the Creator. Love of our country likewise, while it consists with love to

mankind at large, is love to our neighbour according to the degree of proximity, and may be expressed in seeking the real good of our own nation by every fair and equitable endeavour. But Roman and Grecian patriotism is downright selfishness, a bigotry in benevolence, instead of philanthropy. It is good-will to a few, foolishly seeking their prejudicial aggrandizement, at the expence of the ruin and misery of all the world besides. It is therefore the honour of Christianity, that it makes no mention of so proud, rapacious, and malignant a disposition.

Love to our neighbours as ourselves is also shewn by benevolence and compassion for men of no religion, of false religions, or even of the vilest characters. It forbids us to do them any injury, or to persecute them for their sentiments or practices; or any way to molest them, except as they become obnoxious to punishment for disturbing the peace of the community. We must not needlessly propagate reports to their disadvantage, even if true; much less may we slander and misrepresent them. We ought to watch opportunities of doing them good, and conciliating them by kind usage; not disdaining, or despairing of, them; but praying and hoping that they may be converted from the evil of their ways, and saved from destruction. And this consists very well with separating from their company, " not bidding them God speed, lest we " partake of their evil deeds;" and all other protests, which we are commanded to enter against their principles and conduct.

We are even required to love our most virulent and injurious enemies and persecutors; after the example

of the Lord's love to us, when rebels against him. Not that we ought to love them more than our friends and brethren; as some have misinterpreted these precepts, that they might expose them to contempt. But we should still bear good-will to our foes, wish them well and pray for them, watch against all resentment, and not suffer ourselves to be overcome with evil, but still strive to overcome evil with good. We ought to keep our hearts diligently, that we may not rejoice either in their crimes, disgrace, or misery; to cultivate compassion for them, especially in respect of their souls; to shew a forbearing, forgiving, and reconcileable, disposition; to spare no pains, and grudge no expence or self denial, in attempting to do them good; and to seize on every opportunity of relieving their temporal distresses, in order to make way for seeking their more important advantage. "If thine enemy "hunger, feed him: if he thirst, give him drink; for "in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his "head." In these cases, we should be ready to relieve the most wicked and ungrateful: but in ordinary circumstances our brethren and friends have a prior claim to our special kindness; even as our heavenly Father causes "his sun to shine and his rain to descend on "the wicked and ungrateful," but reserves his peculiar blessings for his children.

The example of the Lord's love to us when enemies, every part of the plan of redemption, the ministry of reconciliation, and the past and present kindness of our God to his believing servants, furnish motives and arguments, for the constant practice of all those loving dispositions, and that peaceable and affection-

ate conduct; which are indispensably required of Christ's disciples, as the only sure evidences that they are true believers, and that their sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

Let us compare these things with the apostle's description of love, as stated in the context. "Love," says he, "suffereth long and is kind; love envieth not: "love vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; does not "behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own, is not "easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in "iniquity; but rejoiceth in the truth: beareth all things, "believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all "things." St. Paul doubtless spake of love to men for the Lord's sake: love expressed both by doing and suffering; love to both their bodies and souls: a patient, long-suffering, unostentatious, disinterested, prudent, modest, unsuspicious, condescending, self-denying, forgiving, and fervent affection to our neighbours and brethren; expressed in the persevering use of every means suited to do them good; and unwearied, by suffering or ill-usage, in seeking to accomplish this benevolent and compassionate object. Next to the example of Christ; the conduct of the apostle himself forms undoubtedly the best exposition of his language, that was ever yet given.

II. Then we proceed, very briefly to shew, in what respects love is greater than faith and hope; and how this consists with the doctrine of salvation by grace, justification by faith alone.

Love is greater than faith and hope; because it constitutes the end for which faith and hope are appointed and rendered effectual. "The end of the com-

" mandment," or the message of the gospel, " is love, " out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and " of faith unfeigned."* It is the design of the whole gospel to recover men from a state of apostacy, enmity, selfishness, and malignity, to that love of God and man which the law commands; and to induce them, by obligations of inestimable value, and by new principles implanted in the heart, to express that love in all their tempers and conduct. This salvation, through the blood of Christ, can only be perceived and applied by *faith:* and the completion of it is the object of *hope:* but *love* is the disposition, health, and felicity, to which man must be restored, in connexion with forgiveness of sin and reconciliation to God. It is the prize itself, of which faith and hope must gradually put us in possession. In proportion as we love, we "dwell in " God, and God in us;" we anticipate heaven, and possess the blessing: for God is love, and heaven is love. A magnificent edifice cannot be erected without scaffolding; yet the building is greater than the scaffolding, being the sole end for which that is necessary: and when it is finished the scaffolding is removed as an useless encumbrance.

Love will endure for ever; but faith and hope will soon be swallowed up in sight and enjoyment. In heaven they will be no longer wanted: but love will there be perfected; and every alloy of envy, selfishness, prejudice, or aversion removed; every uneasy, self denying exercise changed for such as are more delightful; and all coldness and deficiency remedied. The

* 1 Tim. i. 5.

blessed inhabitants will love God with their whole souls, and each other as themselves; and the felicity of every individual will increase the joy of all the rest. Love must therefore be greater than faith and hope; because more excellent in its nature, and more enduring in its use. Faith and hope are only necessary in this introductory scene; though honourable to God and profitable to us in the highest degree: but the former will flourish for ever, the business, element, joy, and glory of heaven itself; uniting God and all holy creatures in the most perfect harmony and felicity.*

Yet love cannot perform the functions of faith or hope, any more than the eye can perform the office of the ear, or the hand that of the foot. However excellent, it can do nothing towards justifying a sinner. The little measure of it, to which we here attain, can neither reverse the curse of the broken law, nor form our bond of union with Christ, that we may be justified in that "righteousness of God, which is upon all, "and unto all that believe." Even were our love perfected, previous to justification, it could not atone for past sins, or merit everlasting life: but in fact it is the fruit of the Spirit of Christ, and the seal of our gratuitous justification. The instructions of scripture concerning love, when duly considered, prove our need of this free salvation: and the measure of it to which we are restored is a part of that salvation, and an earnest and evidence of the whole. It is therefore very obvious to see, that love is greater than faith or

* 1 Col. iii. 14.

hope; that "we are" nevertheless, "saved by grace, through faith;" and that "he who believeth shall be "saved, and he who believeth not shall be damned."

My brethren, let us learn from this important subject, not to oppose one part of scripture to another, as many fatally do. That apparent love, which does not spring from faith, and is not accompanied by repentance, humility, hope, patience, and other holy dispositions, is a counterfeit: and so is the faith that does not work by love, and the hope which does not purify the heart. That love to our neighbour, which is not the result of love to Christ, is not the love which the sacred writers extol; nor can we love the bodies of men aright, if we neglect their souls; or regard their souls, if we do not relieve their temporal wants as we have opportunity and ability.

While we hold fast the principles of the gospel, let us beware of barren notions, spiritual pride, and a vain glorious use of our endowments. These may be splendid in the judgment of man: but they are nothing, and worse than nothing, in the sight of God. A bitter, boasting, and censorious zeal characterizes "the wis-"dom, that is from beneath; and is earthly, sensual, "and devilish:" not that "which is from above, and "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be in-"treated, full of mercy and good fruits, without par-"tiality, and without hypocrisy."*—Let us then, my brethren, follow after love: but let us see to it that it be the genuine affection, the nature and effects of which

* James iii. 13—18.

the scripture describes, and which connects the various parts of Christianity into one consistent whole.

We may likewise observe, that the least degree of those holy tempers, which are common to believers is inconceivably more valuable to the possessor, than those shining gifts and accomplishments, by which some are distinguished, but which may exist without living faith. Such were the gifts of tongues and prophecy, miraculous powers, or apostolical authority, which might exist apart from saving grace: and such are learning, genius, eloquence, and other admired endowments, which men covet, envy, or ostentatiously display.

But next to the possession of that holiness which inseparably accompanies salvation; we should desire and seek such gifts, as may qualify us for the duties of our several stations; and we should pray earnestly, that "Our love may abound yet more and more in "knowledge and in all judgment; that we may approve "things that are excellent; that we may be sincere "and without offence, till the day of Christ: being "filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by "Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God."*

* Phil. i. 9—11.

SERMON XV.

PHILIPPIANS i, 27.

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.

ST. Paul wrote his epistle, as well as some others, from his prison at Rome: and it is manifest that the Lord was with him, as he had been with Joseph in similar circumstances; which rendered his confinement unspeakably more pleasant, than a splendid palace with a guilty conscience and ungovernable passions. Instead of dejection, murmurs, or resentment, we find the apostle uniformly employing the language of cheerfulness, confidence, and exultation. He declares that "to him to live was Christ, and to "die "gain." All his credit, interest, business, and pleasure in life, consisted in communion with Christ, and earnest endeavours to glorify him and promote his cause: and he was sure, that death, in whatever form it should arrest him, would prove his richest advantage.—What a blessed religion is this, which can turn the king of terrors into a kind friend, and the

loss of all terrestrial things into the most valuable of acquisitions! What, my brethren, can wealth, reputation, authority, genius, or philosophy propose, which is comparable to this? Why then should you hesitate to sell all, and purchase the Pearl of great price?

But though the apostle had a longing "desire to "depart and be with Christ, as far better;" yet he was willing to continue on earth, "for the furtherance and "joy of faith" of his beloved people.—As if a pardoned rebel should voluntarily submit to the inconveniences and sufferings of a dungeon, in order to recommend the clemency of his prince to other criminals; or be helpful to those, who having likewise received mercy, were for some important purposes retained a while longer in confinement.

Hence he took occasion to exhort the Philippians in the following words, "Only let your conversation be, "as it becometh the gospel of Christ; that whether I "come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of "your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one "mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel; "and in nothing terrified by your adversaries."—From the part of this exhortation, contained in our text, I shall endeavour,

I. To give a compendious view of the gospel of Christ.

II. To shew, that this gospel, when rightly understood and truly believed, will produce a correspondent conduct and conversation.

III. To mention some leading particulars in which "a conversation becoming the gospel" more especially consists.

IV. To make some remarks on the emphatical word "Only."

I. I would attempt to give a compendious view of the gospel of Christ.

We know that the word rendered *gospel* signifies *glad tidings;* and a preacher of the gospel is a messenger or herald, bringing and publishing good news. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of "them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad "tidings of good things?"*

The Ephesians, having formed the design of building the celebrated temple of Diana, were at a loss where to procure a sufficient quantity of the finest marble, to accomplish the plan: and it is recorded, that a certain person, in this emergency, found a quarry at no great distance, exactly suited to the purpose. Running therefore without delay to inform the citizens of this fortunate event, he was saluted, and afterwards called, *Evangelus* or *The bringer of good tidings;* a name of exactly the same import, with that rendered a preacher of the gospel, or an evangelist. But though his tidings were infinitely less important and joyful than our's; it may be questioned, whether any whole city ever thus gladly welcomed the message of salvation: and we know that in general it meets with a very different reception.

Good tidings often derive a great part of their value, from their suitableness to the case of those who hear them. The promulgation of good laws and the

* Isai. lii. 7. Rom. x. 15.

impartial administration of justice, though valuable blessings in themselves, can give no pleasure to condemned malefactors; but a report of the king's clemency, or an assurance of a pardon, would suit their case, and tend to cheer their drooping hearts. An act of grace is glad tidings to confined debtors, though it may give umbrage to their creditors: and the arrival of a fleet with provisions in a time of urgent famine, occasions a joy, of which such as live in plenty can form no adequate conception. We must therefore understand something of our own condition, before we can cordially welcome the gospel of Christ: and inattention or mistake, in this respect, forms, one grand reason, why so many slight the message of salvation. But lectures on moral duties, separated from the doctrines of grace, no more meet the case of lost sinners; than extracts from the statute-book can give comfort and hope to condemned criminals.

We may know something of our situation by facts; and the scripture further explains the humiliating and alarming subject. It cannot be denied that the world is full of crimes and miseries; this is equally certain, whether men believe or disbelieve the Bible. Even they who are averse to the doctrine of human depravity, when applied to themselves and their connexions; shew by the caution with which they transact their affairs, that they consider mankind in general as basely selfish: and he who at first disdains this sentiment, as unjust and illiberal, will be at length constrained to adopt it, or become a prey to designing men. Hence it is, that incautious young persons, having been repeatedly deceived, often grow suspicious

and peevish as they advance in years: and manifest their vexation by reviling this or the other class of men. As if the fault lay in their rank or profession, and were not common to the human species, however restrained, disguised, or modified; except as true religion produces an effectual change of disposition.

At the same time, it is evident, that all our comforts are entwined with cares and disquietudes; every enjoyment, after a while, palls and grows insipid; all our possessions are precarious, and may either be torn from us, or become the causes of the most exquisite anguish. Pain and sickness are entailed upon us: death is certain, and who knows how near? Its approach is dreadful, its stroke inevitable, and its *visible* effects intolerably mortifying. A dark gloom overshadows the rest: who but he that believes the sure testimony of God, can say, what is beyond the grave? Yet there are forebodings of future retribution, which most men experience to their additional alarm: so that numbers seem to suffer many deaths in fearing one. To escape such distressing reflections, they who are not confined by daily business, have recourse to dissipation. These at first yield a childish delight; but soon become irksome, unless novelty be superadded by unceasing variety. This is the real secret of publick and private diversions; and of the liberality with which immense sums are expended, in encouraging new species of amusement, however frivolous and absurd. These enable men, for a moment, to escape from the tediousness of life, or the anguish of solitude and reflection; and tend to promote forgetfulness of God, of death, and of a judgment to come.

We appeal to every man's feelings and observation whether this description does not accord with facts? and whether it have any dependence on any set of religious opinions. Let us then enquire what light the scriptures throw upon the subject. There we learn, that "God made man in his own image," and created the world "very good:" but that the first parents of our race ungratefully rebelled against their bountiful Creator, and disobeyed his express and easy command. Thus "by one man sin entered into the world, "and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, "in that all have sinned." The holy image of God was also effaced, and from that time man was naturally incapable of spiritual felicity, dead in sin, and prone to every kind of evil.

When the *root* of our race thus fell, all the branches fell with him, and became mortal and sinful; from the heart of fallen men evil thoughts, words, and works, continually proceed: and the natural effect of their crimes unites with the righteous indignation of God, in rendering this life a scene of labour and sorrow: and as, "it is appointed to all men once to die, and after "death the judgment;" still more terrible miseries may justly be dreaded in a future world. A criminal may suffer many things previous to his trial and condemnation; but his principal punishment follows afterwards. And as the human soul is subject to sinful passions, corresponding to the diseases of the body: we not only must inevitably be exposed to condemnation at the tribunal of God; but we also carry in our lapsed nature the seeds of misery and destruction.

We have, however, another view given us, in the sacred oracles, of our actual condition, still more suited "to stop every mouth, and to bring in all the world guilty before God."—We are doubtless, as reasonable creatures, accountable to our supreme Governor and Judge, for every part of our conduct; and his holy law is the rule, by which every disposition, word, and action must be tried. Now, who does not feel, that he hath in many instances violated the reasonable and righteous commandments of God? Who hath not heard that "cursed is every one, that *continueth not* "*in all things* written in the book of the law to do "them?"

Thus "the scripture hath concluded all under sin:" and it was not without *cause*, I hope not without *meaning*, that we this morning added, after each of the commandments, 'Lord, have mercy upon us, and 'incline our hearts to keep this law.'

The man, who carefully compares his past and present conduct with this most strict and spiritual standard, will soon find his own conscience bring in a verdict against him: "And if our hearts condemn us, "God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all "things." No repentance or amendment can compensate for past offences; because we cannot in any instance exceed our present duty; and our debt increases in proportion as we still fall short of perfect obedience. Nor can we estimate the intrinsick evil of our sins against the infinite majesty of heaven, or the punishment we deserve for our ungrateful rebellion.

When we attempt to frame our conduct by the holy law of God, we feel a surprizing reluctance and back-

wardness to this most reasonable service, and a strong propensity to disobedience. Evil dispositions, though common to all, are in some exceedingly strengthened by habit, and rendered ungovernable by peculiar temptations. Such men, therefore, as have serious thoughts and form good purposes, commonly find their resolutions enervated, and their endeavours baffled: and after some fruitless efforts, they return to their former course of life; unless relieved by the gospel of Christ.

When these things are seriously considered, the condition of mankind appears truly deplorable. Related to God and an eternal world; exposed to death and a future judgment; already guilty of many heinous crimes, and propense to increase the number; liable to final condemnation, and "vessels of wrath fitted "to destruction;" what can any one do, to rescue or ransom himself or his brother from the awful sentence already published by the Judge, "Depart, ye cursed, "into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his "angels?" It is in vain to reason and dispute against facts, and the sure testimony of scripture: "Who art "thou that repliest against God? Shall not the Judge "of all the earth do right? Shall mortal man be more "just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his "Maker?"*

Let us rather submit to his righteousness, and seek that relief which his gospel proposes to us. The Lord, against whom we have rebelled, hath revealed himself

* Job iv. 17.

to us, as " merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, " transgression, and sin;" and hath made way for the exercise of his boundless mercy, in harmony with infinite justice and holiness, in the person, redemption, and mediation of his beloved Son. And the divine Saviour, having made a complete atonement for sin, brought in everlasting righteousness, and triumphed over all our enemies, now reigneth Lord of all worlds, and is " able to save to the uttermost all them that " come to God by him; seeing he ever liveth to make " intercession for them."

The proposal of mercy and grace, " without mo- " ney and without price," to the chief of sinners: the pressing invitations, and persuasions, with which God doth by his ministers beseech us to be reconciled to him; the actual pardon and complete justification of every true believer; the gift of the Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify our souls; the exceeding great and precious promises, privileges, and engagements of the new covenant; and the present comfort and future inheritance of the Lord's adopted children, might be particularly insisted on, in discussing the subject. These are in all respects good news, glad tidings, most needful for us, suited to our case, sufficient for our happiness, springing from love unspeakable, and terminating in the everlasting salvation and glory of all, who obtain an interest in them. This is the gospel of Christ; the most rejoicing report, that ever reached the ears of mortal man. Little indeed has been said on such a subject: yet that little may serve to introduce an attempt,

II. To shew, that this gospel, when rightly understood and truly believed, will produce a correspondent conduct and conversation.

This will appear, if we consider the information given us, on the most interesting subjects, and such as are most intimately connected with our judgment and practice. "That God, who commanded the light "to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, "to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory "in the face of Jesus Christ." The discoveries made to us in the gospel, concerning the mysteries of the Godhead and the harmony of the divine perfections, are suited to excite our highest admiration, adoration, and love; and to make us exclaim, "How great is his "goodness! how great is his beauty!" And hence we must perceive, that God is worthy of all possible love, worship, confidence, and obedience; that happiness consists in his favour; that his image is beauty and excellency, and his service perfect freedom.

The views which the gospel of Christ gives us of the holy law of God, as worthy to be honoured, both in its requirements and sanctions, by the obedience and atoning sacrifice of him whom all angels worship, is suited to impress our minds with the deepest sense of its excellency and authority. The clear revelation of an eternal state of righteous retributions, and of the unmingled happiness or misery which succeeds this present life, is sufficient, when truly believed, to swallow up all our anxiety about this vanishing scene; and to make the eager pursuits of worldly men appear as frivolous as the sports of children, or as infatuated as

the mirth of condemned criminals, in a state of intoxication.

The gospel shews us also the *evil* of sin in the most affecting light. "We know that the judgment "of God is according to truth:" and here we especially learn his judgment in this important concern. The language of the gospel is that of infinite and everlasting love and mercy: yet it declares sin to be so enormous and malignant an evil, that, rather than leave it unpunished, "God spared not his own Son, "but delivered him up for us all." How can an enlightened believer look to the cross, without mourning for his sins, abhorring them as the murderers of Christ his Lord, and earnestly longing for the destruction of every evil propensity from his heart and nature?

Various other subjects might be mentioned, but they frequently call for our attention. The worth of an immortal soul, the ruined state of mankind, the vanity of worldly prosperity, and many similar instructions, emphatically conveyed to us by the gospel, are exactly suited to form the believer to a holy and heavenly temper and conversation.

The knowledge of our duty, and of the divine authority by which it is enjoined us, is not sufficient for practical purposes, in the present state of human nature: our affections must also be influenced by such powerful motives, as may preponderate against all that can be cast into the opposite scale. But *proximity* gives earthly things an immense advantage. As objects appear large when near, but seem to diminish when removed to a distance: so *present* things are

considered as important beyond all proportion; while things *future*, though immensely more valuable, are thought to be of little consequence, and scarcely possess any influence over the minds of men in general. But *faith* (like a telescope), brings objects invisible to unbelievers near to the soul; and enables us to contemplate, as *real* and of infinite magnitude, those things which other men consider as doubtful, remote, and uninteresting: while the Holy Spirit, producing in us a new and heavenly nature, makes us capable of perceiving the glory, and relishing the excellency of spiritual blessings. Thus they obtain the ascendancy in our judgment and choice; we become spiritually minded, and savour the things which are of God; bonds which fastened our hearts to earthly objects are broken; the balance turns the other way; and we set our "affections on things above, not on things on the "earth."

"Fear not," says our Lord to his disciples, "Fear "not them that kill the body, and after that have no "more that they can do: but fear him who is able to "destroy both soul and body in hell."—When the gospel is really understood and believed, we "fear, "lest a promise being left us of entering into heaven-"ly rest, any of us should seem to come short of it;" and this apprehension prevails over our dread of labour, reproach, scorn, self-denial, or persecution: yea, the fear of divine chastening, of grieving the Spirit, of a wounded conscience, or of dishonouring the doctrine of Christ, is a powerful motive to watchfulness and prayer. The desire of everlasting felicity in the favour of God, and of the present consola-

tions found in communion with him, subordinate our hungerings and thirstings after earthly objects.—"A "kingdom that cannot be moved;" "glory, honour, "and immortality;" "treasures in heaven that fail "not," and "pleasures at God's right hand for ever-"more," are blessings commensurate with our largest wishes and capacities, and durable as our immortal souls: and the lively hope of this incorruptible inheritance, grounded on the sure word of God, and sealed by his sanctifying Spirit; is capable of triumphing over all our expectations of temporal advantages, distinctions, and gratifications; and of animating the soul to "patient continuance in well-doing." Love to our God and Saviour, likewise, unites its powerful influences: and while we cleave to him with fervent desires, rejoice in him with admiring gratitude, and are fervently zealous for the honour of his name; we shall feel constrained by this supreme affection "to "live no-longer to ourselves, but to him who died "for us and rose again."—Thus we shall be prepared to venture, suffer, and labour, in seeking to glorify his name and recommend his precious salvation.

The encouragements of the gospel also are very efficacious. The sinner who attempts to amend his life, according to the word of God, is very liable to grow weary in his attempts. The law seems to say to him, "Pay me that thou owest;" and he appears to himself further and further removed from the righteousness, which he went about to establish, and that victory over his passions which he expected speedily to accomplish. On the other hand if he make the principles of morality, or some *mitigated law* his

standard: he is at a loss to determine how much obedience will entitle him to acceptance; and uncertainty tends to discouragement. For the diligent and conscientious are in this case always harassed with doubts; and none but the heedless and self-confident think themselves *good enough* to be the objects of the divine favour.

But Christ invites all that are athirst to come to him, and "he will give them of the Fountain of the "water of life freely;" and assures the trembling sinner, that "he will in *no wise cast out* any one that "comes to him." It runs in this gracious tenour, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall "find; knock and it shall be opened unto you: for "every one that asketh receiveth." As therefore every blessing is freely given, for Christ's sake, to the poor supplicant, however unworthy: nothing but pride, unbelief, contempt of heavenly things, aversion to God and religion, or idolatrous love of the world, can exclude any sinner from this great salvation. Every part of the plan is free from ambiguity: our wants are distinctly stated; promises are given exactly answering to them; means are appointed, in which we may apply for the performance of these promises; and God pledges the honour of his faithfulness, that every one, who seeks the blessing in the appointed way, shall certainly obtain it. Delays and difficulties may intervene to prove our sincerity: but sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than any word of God shall fail of its accomplishment.

The assistance likewise, proposed by the gospel, tends to produce a peculiar conduct and conversation

in the true believer. Evil habits, corrupt propensities, bad connexions, and strong temptations are not easily broken off and mastered; and our resolution is found by experience to be unequal to the conflict: but the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit enables the Christian to surmount every obstacle, and to resist and overcome all his enemies. He feels he can do nothing of himself; but he finds, "that he can do all "things through Christ who strengtheneth him."— Thus by "waiting on the Lord he renews his "strength," and rises superior to those difficulties, which all other men find in the event to be insurmountable.

The assurances, made of an abundant present and future recompence, to those who renounce temporal things for the sake of Christ and the gospel; the supports afforded in seasons of trial and affliction; the authoritative and perfect example set before us; the obligations conferred upon us, and the glorious prospects that open to our view, are all of them exceedingly influential on the believer's spirit and conduct. But we must proceed,

III. To mention some leading particulars, in which "a conversation becoming the gospel of Christ," more especially consists.

Every doctrine of the gospel requires, and is suited to produce, *humility* in all its variety of exercises. The whole seems arranged on purpose to lay us low in self-abasement, to exclude all boasting and glorying in ourselves, to produce deep repentance, to render us poor in spirit and contrite in heart, and to form our dispositions teachable, lowly, unambitious and

unassuming. When therefore we speak and act in this manner, our conversation is consistent with our principles, and becomes our profession: but self-confidence, self-importance, vain-glorious vaunting, desire of praise or pre-eminence, and an unteachable, dogmatizing, or overbearing deportment, are more unbecoming and odious in one who professes to believe the gospel, than in any other person.

From this deep humility, patience, contentment, and thankfulness must proportionably arise. "It is "of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed:" our sufferings are less than our iniquities; our mercies are invaluable and unmerited; our situation is appointed by God our Saviour, in perfect wisdom, truth, and love: our light afflictions are counterbalanced by divine consolations; and they "work for us "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." So that it becomes us to be resigned, satisfied and thankful, in every circumstance: and repining, fretfulness and discontent, are entirely inconsistent with evangelical principles.

Confidence in God likewise peculiarly becometh the gospel of Christ. "The Lord is our Light, and "our Salvation: whom then shall we fear?" "If God "be for us, who can be against us?" To be calm and collected in perilous situations; to recognize the hand of God in the alarming events of life, and hence to assume courage and cheerful expectation; to rely on his providential care amidst temporal losses and difficulties; and in every case to say, "It is the Lord, "let him do what seemeth him good;" becomes the character of his redeemed people. But too often he

may rebuke us and say, "Why are ye so fearful, O "ye of little faith?"—We act also consistently with our principles, when we take pleasure in attending on the ordinances of God; when we count the holy day of rest honourable and delightful; when we are glad to have it said to us, "Let us go unto the house of "the Lord;" and when we prefer his courts, and the communion of the saints, above all other places of resort, and every other kind of society. It becomes the professors of the gospel, to abound in praises, and thanksgivings; to reverence the name and the word of God; to worship him in their families with evident alacrity as well as punctuality; to seek his blessing on every undertaking; to praise him for every deliverance and benefit; to act habitually as in his presence; to devote themselves to his service; and to seek all their happiness from him: and, whatever is contrary to this is unbecoming the gospel, and dishonourable to our profession.

Even worldly men, while they charge our doctrines with a licentious tendency, expect more from us in our conduct towards them, than they do from each other. This evidently appears to be the case: for a single instance of immorality, in one that professes the gospel, excites general attention, and becomes a topick of discourse; while the numberless crimes of other men are very slightly noticed.—This should remind us, that strict integrity, veracity, sincerity, and punctuality to our engagements, become our profession: and that both the world and the church will charge us with inconsistency, if we at all deviate from this direct uprightness of conduct and conversation.

An inoffensive deportment is likewise necessary, if we would walk "worthy of God," and "as it be-"cometh saints." We must no more injure a man, from heedlessness, than from selfishness: We must not wound any person's character, interrupt his domestick comfort, or needlessly disquiet his mind. We should carefully avoid exciting men's passions, provoking them to anger, or tempting them to envy, ambition, or discontent. We should "study to be "quiet and mind our own business," without intermeddling with other men's matters; and to be peaceable, orderly, and industrious neighbours and members of the community. We ought so to avoid evil, and the appearance of evil, that none may have any thing to say against us, except it be for our religious peculiarities.

General benevolence also becomes the gospel of rich grace and mercy. Every man almost, may at some times, by retrenching superfluities, do a little to shew his compassion and good-will to his afflicted neighbours. From those "to whom much is given "much is required." There are likewise various other methods, by which a friendly disposition may be manifested; and this is peculiarly ornamental to the gospel. The more entirely we renounce all dependence on our good works, the greater alacrity and zeal we should manifest in performing them: and this will be our disposition, if, indeed "we know the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," and understand our obligations to him, who "loved us, and washed "us from our sins in his own blood." Indeed, even in this lukewarm age, the excellency of the gospel

does appear in this respect; for the liberality of those, who profess to rely on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, is vastly greater, in proportion to their circumstances, than that of such persons, as expect in part at least to atone for their own sins and to purchase heaven, by their good works. But "we beseech "you, brethren, to abound more and more."

We should also exercise meekness, forgiveness of injuries, and unwearied perseverance in endeavouring to overcome evil with good: for these things peculiarly become those, who own themselves so deeply indebted to the pardoning mercy and abundant grace of God our Saviour. An exact attention to every relative duty: a condescending, affable, and modest demeanour, "in honour preferring one another:" a constant endeavour to "keep the unity of the Spirit in "the bond of peace;" to promote brotherly love; and to concur in every design, for advancing the purity and enlargement of the Church, and the benefit of mankind, are evidently and eminently becoming the gospel of Christ.

To these we should add, habits of strict sobriety and temperance; moderation and regard to expediency in the use of things lawful, and in every worldly pursuit; and indifference about external decoration; an entire disregard to those frivolous amusements, in which numbers waste their time and substance; a disinterested conduct, remote from all suspicion of covetousness; a strict government of the passions; and a tongue bridled and refrained from vain and improper discourse, but prepared to speak such things as are edifying and useful. These are evidently parts of that

conversation which becometh the gospel of Christ: and reflection may enable every one to add to this specimen many others of a similar nature.—We proceed therefore,

IV. To make some observations on the emphatical word "Only."

Some persons think, that the apostle meant in this manner to intimate the reasonableness of his exhortations; and no doubt we have abundant cause to consider them in this light: yet I apprehend that this is not the import of the expression. It rather implies that nothing could prove injurious in the event to professed Christians, provided their conversation were consistent with their principles. And we may apply this general instruction to various cases.

There may be wars, and rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, revolutions, and distress of nations with perplexity; yea, the sun shall be turned into darkness, the heavens shall be rolled up as a scroll, the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth with all its works shall be burnt up: but none of these events need alarm the consistent Christian: For "what shall "separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribula- "tion, or distress, or persecution, or nakedness, or "peril, or the sword? Nay, in all these things we are "more than conquerors through him that loved us."* "God is our Refuge and Strength; a very present "help in trouble: therefore we will not fear though "the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried "into the depths of the sea."†

* Rom. viii. 35—39. † Ps. xlvi. 1, 2.

Affecting changes may likewise take place in our families; our beloved relatives may be torn from us, our friends alienated, and our property lost; poverty, contempt, and sickness may oppress us; and we may fall under unmerited censure and reproach, so that even our brethren may mistake our case and character, as Job's friends did his: but "if our conversa-"tion be as it becometh the gospel of Christ," none of these things can hurt us. The Lord will enable us to rejoice in the testimony of our conscience; he will plead our cause, and vindicate our reputation; he will not leave us comfortless, but will afford us proportionable supports: "No weapon formed against us shall "prosper, and every tongue that riseth against us in "judgment we shall condemn;" and when we have been tried we shall come forth as gold purified from the furnace.

Changes may likewise take place in the church: many who have been useful to us, may be removed, and among them the very "ministers by whom we believed:" nay, such persons as we most looked up to, may "forsake Christ having loved this present "world;" or become zealous teachers of destructive heresies. But if our conversation be consistent with our profession: our own experience of the Lord's faithfulness, and the sanctifying efficacy of his word, will preserve us from fatal effects; and teach us by such events, to be more watchful, and simple in our dependence on divine grace.

Some persons may be perplexed with difficulties, in respect of certain points of doctrine: but if they truly embrace the salvation of Christ, and walk wor-

thy of it; they will be at length led to establishment in the truth. "If any man *will* do the will of God, he "shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." An upright heart and an obedient will directly tend to free the mind from the clouds of various prejudices and passions, to produce teachableness, and to improve spiritual discernment: and there are numerous promises of divine teaching to persons of this description. But they, "who love darkness rather than light, be- "cause their deeds are evil," are given up to strong delusions, and fall into final condemnation.

Difficulties also occur to many, in determining whether they be in a state of salvation or not: nor are they able, after much self-examination, to decide the important question. To these likewise we may say, "On- "ly let your conversation be, as it becometh the gos- "pel of Christ:" and this will have a powerful, though gradual efficacy, in producing the desired satisfaction. "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the "Lord." "For the path of the just shineth more "and more unto the perfect day."

The exhortation before us also points out, to those who are labouring to do good in their families and connexions, or in a more extensive sphere, the grand method of obtaining the desired success: and when the interest of the gospel in any place seems greatly declined; the consistent conduct of the few, who adhere to it, will have the happiest effects in promoting a revival.—Finally some persons are harassed with apprehensions of future trials and temptations, or with the dread of death: but let all such trembling believers attend to the apostle's exhortation; and they may rest

assured, that the grace of the Lord Jesus will be sufficient for them; and his strength be perfected in their weakness. "For I am persuaded that neither death, "nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, "nor things, present, nor things to come; nor height, "nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to "separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ "Jesus our Lord."

Seeing we address ourselves to those only, who expect to be thought Christians; the exhortation may be applicable to every individual. Let a becoming conversation prove that you are Christians in reality. But alas, what gloomy reflections crowd into the mind, when this subject comes in our way! Do the generality of nominal Christians live as becomes the gospel? Is not the conversation of a vast majority diametrically opposite to the spirit and precepts of our holy religion? Who can imagine that Christ will own such men as his true disciples? Who can doubt, but that it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for them?

There are persons, who say, 'When you instruct 'us in our duty, we regard you: we are not infidels; 'we have always believed the doctrines of Christiani-'ty.' But let me ask you; have these doctrines properly influenced your heart and life? If they have not; then surely you have believed in vain! You would say to an antinomian professor of justification by faith alone, who lived an immoral life; "Know, O vain "man, that faith without works is dead." Beware then lest you slide into antinomianism of a more reputable kind. Faith and practice are not like grapes tied upon

a wine-branch; but like grapes growing upon a living vine. True faith receives the doctrines of the gospel into the heart, where they produce a change in the judgment, dispositions, and affections: thus the tree becomes good, and good fruit is the genuine consequence.

This is real Christianity; and all that comes short of this, however distinguished, is a mere name, notion, or form. But if we have thus received the gospel; we shall be conscious, that we have in many things fallen short of a becoming conversation. Let us then humbly seek forgiveness of the past; and beg to be enabled henceforth so to abide in Christ, "that we "may bring forth much fruit," "and walk worthy of "God, who hath called us to his kingdom and glory." Amen.

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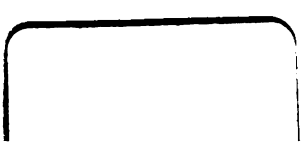
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